

## Master Thesis in Development Management

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# Collective Actions for Empowerment and Poverty Reduction in Rural Chiapas, Mexico

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***COLLECTIVE ACTIONS for EMPOWERMENT and  
POVERTY REDUCTION in rural CHIAPAS, MEXICO***

**Master of Science  
in  
Development Management**

Kristin Hvideberg Tobiassen

Spring 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of  
Science in Development Management

*XUK'UL XUK'UL B'MI MAJEL ÑA'JT MI KO'TIEL*

*EL QUE CAMINA DESPACIO LLEGA LEJOS*

*THE ONE WITH A STEADY PACE GOES FURTHER*

(Tzotzil proverb)

## **ABSTRACT**

The present thesis is an investigation of rural community development in the Venustiano Carranza Province of Chiapas, Mexico. The objectives have been to analyze people's experiences of collective work, and how this work, the social capital formation and access to capacity building courses might be leading to individual empowerment in the rural communities.

The thesis begins with an introduction to the study area and an outline of the theories of alternative development and community approaches, and a presentation of the theories of empowerment, social capital and collective actions. It is argued that developing the intellectual, physical and environmental capacities in rural communities can lead to various processes of individual empowerment (Monaheng, 2001), and that the strong social capital can enhance these achievements (Narayan et al, 2002b: p.15; Villager and Enes, 2004: p.6). Further it is argued this can be actualized only through a participatory rural organization, as the most important element in a capacity building model (Friedman, 1992; Monaheng, 2001).

Using the case of the NGO DESMI's work in rural Chiapas, important discoveries were made in the fieldwork. The collective work, assisted by DESMI, clearly led to social capital formation as trust-building between the members. This was particularly visible in collectives where the members participated in regular meetings, and jointly planned and carried out the work. Norms of solidarity and reciprocity were established between them from being in the same life situations, which serve as protection against sudden poverty or difficult times for the member families.

The members of the collectives investigated, further enjoyed several processes of empowerment from the participation. As a collective, they achieved contact with DESMI, and obtained loans to improve and advance their work. And maybe most importantly, they have gained access to capacity building courses. The access to new information and knowledge has signified social empowerment and enhanced self-belief and self-reliance. Particularly have the courses about organic farming methods the prospects of being economic empowering. The capacity building approach is without doubt geared towards empowerment, but it is the social capital formation in the collectives which have helped the members to fully enjoy and benefit from the access.

The thesis further argues that smaller organizations, like DESMI, have the potential to become an appropriate participatory institution for people's empowerment. The empirical findings from the field research, mainly focusing on a number of collectives in Chiapas, suggested successful performance of the organization in some economic, social, technology, educational and training areas. Important discoveries backing this up are that the organization promotes and trains the collective members to participate in the collective related decision-making processes. I am left without doubt that the empowerment impact of collective work and new knowledge formation through capacity building courses, has multidimensional outcome.

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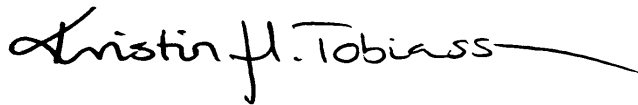
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### **Declaration by candidate**

I, Kristin Hvideberg Tobiassen, hereby declare that the thesis: **Collective Actions for Empowerment and Poverty Reduction in rural Chiapas, Mexico**, has not been submitted to any other universities than Agder University College for any type of academic degree.



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Kristin Hvideberg Tobiassen

June, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007

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Date

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Brief Contextual Overview	1
1.2. Desarrollo Económico Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas	2
1.3. Aims and Research Questions	2
1.4. Personal Motivation	3
1.5. Definition of Central Terms and Concepts	3
1.6. Organization of the Thesis	4
<b>Chapter II: Contextual Overview</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Country Profile - Mexico	5
2.1.1. Economic History – From Restrictions to Liberalization	5
2.1.2. Political History	6
2.2. The Study Area Profile - Chiapas	7
2.2.1. Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of the Four Villages	8
<b>Chapter III: Desmi and the Zapatista Movement</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1. The Development NGO – DESMI	10
3.1.1. The Work Organization	11
3.2. The Zapatista Movement	12
3.2.1. Zapatista Ideology – ‘Solidarity in the age of Globalization’	12
<b>Chapter IV: Theories and Prior Research</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>PART I - Prior Studies and Empirical Findings</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>PART II - Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1. Alternative Development Theory	15
4.1.1. The People Centred Development Approach	16
4.1.2. Capacity-building and Participation to People-Centred Development	17
4.1.3. Social and Solidarity Economics	18
4.2. The Sustainability Concept	19
4.3. Empowerment Theories	19
4.3.1. Expansion of Assets and Capabilities	20
4.3.2. Building Capacities and Skills for Empowerment	20
4.3.3. Critiques of the Empowerment Literature	21
4.4. Theories of Social Capital	21

4.4.1. Social Capital Formation and the Socio-Cultural Glue	22
4.4.2. Social Capital in Development	22
<b>4.5. Theories of Collective Actions</b>	<b>23</b>
4.5.1. Why Cooperate? The 'Prisoner's Dilemma'	24
4.5.2. Costs and Benefits of Collective Actions – The Free Rider Problem	24
<b>PART III - Operationalization of key concepts</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>4.6. Empowerment – 'Participation'</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>4.7. Social Capital – 'Social Networks'</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>4.8. Propositions</b>	<b>27</b>
 <b>Chapter V: Methodology</b>	 <b>28</b>
<b>5.1. Research Methodology</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5.2. Qualitative Research Methods</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>5.3. Interviews - Unstructured and Open-ended</b>	<b>29</b>
5.3.1. Interview Approach: Length, Spacing and Number of Interviews	30
5.3.2. Sampling and Selection of Informants	30
5.3.3. Case Studies	31
5.3.4. The Interview Setting	32
<b>5.4. Participant Observation</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>5.5. Social Network Mapping</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5.6. Possible Research Problems</b>	<b>33</b>
5.6.1. A Foreigner in the Research Setting	34
5.6.2. Gender Sensitivity	34
<b>5.7. The Interpretation of Qualitative Data</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>5.8. Validity and Reliability</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>5.9. Confidentiality and Anonymity</b>	<b>35</b>
 <b>Chapter VI: Collective Work Organization in Chiapas</b>	 <b>37</b>
<b>6.1. The Emergence of Collective Actions</b>	<b>37</b>
6.1.1. Political Motivation for Collective Works	38
6.1.2. Traditions for Collective Work	38
<b>6.2. Nueva Zaqualpa – A Mixed Community</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6.3. Nueva Libertad – Exclusion and Division</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>6.4. Canjobito- Unity Collapsed</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>6.5. Tres Amores- Collective Land Ownership</b>	<b>42</b>



<b>Chapter VII: Results and Discussion</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>PROPOSITION ONE – Collective work and Social Capital</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>7.1. The Number of Ties</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>7.2. The Strength of Ties</b>	<b>46</b>
7.2.1. Trust and Success	47
7.2.2. The Strength in Small Group Face to Face Interaction	47
7.2.3. Smaller Needs and Stronger Ties	48
7.2.4. Family Relations, Collectives and Zapatista Belonging	49
7.2.5. Reciprocity Formed by Collective Work and Immobility	50
<b>7.3. Diversity in the Relations</b>	<b>51</b>
7.3.1. Diversity in Social Space	53
<b>7.4. Summing up Proposition One</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>PROPOSITION TWO – Social Capital, Collective work and Individual Empowerment Processes</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>7.5. Rate of Participation and the Gender Equal Rotating System</b>	<b>55</b>
7.5.1. Participation of Members versus Non-Members	56
<b>7.6. Social Empowerment</b>	<b>56</b>
7.6.1. Social Capital Lubricates Participation	57
7.6.2. Communication and the Sharing of Information	57
7.6.3. The Collective Store as Social Meeting Place	58
7.6.4. Empowerment by Capacity Building - the Access to new Knowledge	58
7.6.5. Low Social Interaction and Barriers to Information Flow	59
7.6.6. The Zapatista Identity and Knowledge-sharing	60
7.6.7. Contact with the Outside World	60
<b>7.7. Political Empowerment</b>	<b>61</b>
7.7.1. The Collective Work and Common Decision-Making	62
7.7.2. The Rotating System for Everyone's Political Empowerment	62
7.7.3. Increased Self-belief as Partaker in Collective Actions	63
7.7.4. Investing in the Future with the Collective Money	64
<b>7.8. Psychological Empowerment</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>7.9. Economic Empowerment</b>	<b>66</b>
7.9.1. The Collectively Owned Machinery and Economic Prosperity	66
7.9.2. New Knowledge and Skills – New Economic Opportunities	68
<b>7.10. Free Ride to the Collective Achievements?</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>7.11. Summing up Proposition Two</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>PROPOSITION THREE – Social Capital, Project Performance and Sustainability</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>7.12. DESMI's Development Projects - An Alternative Development Model</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>7.13. Building Capacities in the Solidarity Economics</b>	<b>72</b>
7.13.1. People-Centred Development and Social Capital Formation	73
7.13.2. Organic Farming for Environmental Sustainability	74
7.13.3. Collective Savings a Safety Net towards Sudden Poverty	75
<b>7.14. Sustainable transfer of know-how in the Campesino- a-Campesino model</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>7.15. Summing up Proposition Three</b>	<b>78</b>

<i>Chapter VIII: Summing up and Conclusions</i>	79
<b>8.2. Research Limitations</b>	82
<b>8.3. Prospects for Future Research</b>	82
 <i>References</i>	 84
 <i>APPENDIX 1: The Interview Guide</i>	 90

## LIST OF FIGURES, PHOTOS AND TABLES

### FIGURES

<b>Figure I:</b> Map of Mexico and Chiapas	<b>page 6</b>
<b>Figure II:</b> Map of the five Caracoles/Zapatista Headquarters	<b>page 13</b>
<b>Figure III:</b> Main hypothesis of the interrelations of theory	<b>page 27</b>
<b>Figure IV:</b> Example of a social network map	<b>page 33</b>
<b>Figure V:</b> Example of a Social Network Map, NL4, woman 39	<b>page 47</b>
<b>Figure VI:</b> Example of a Social Network Map, NZ9, man 42	<b>page 50</b>
<b>Figure VII:</b> Example of a Social Network Map, NZ10, man 40	<b>page 52</b>
<b>Figure VIII:</b> Relations in the Empirical Data	<b>page 56</b>

### TABLES

<b>Table I:</b> Comparison between the Neo-Liberal Economy and Solidarity Economy	<b>page 18</b>
<b>Table II:</b> Overview of the Respondents	<b>page 31</b>
<b>Table III:</b> Number and Strength of ties by Village and Collective Participation	<b>page 44</b>
<b>Table IV:</b> Numerical Overview of the Social Network Mapping of Member Respondents	<b>page 45</b>

### PHOTOS

<b>Photo I:</b> Children at the Autonomous School, 02/2007	<b>page 1</b>
<b>Photo II:</b> Mexican Flag, 03/2007	<b>page 5</b>
<b>Photo III:</b> The Sumidero Canyon, Tuxtla, Chiapas, 03/2007	<b>page 7</b>
<b>Photo IV:</b> The DESMI logo (from webpage)	<b>page 10</b>
<b>Photo V:</b> Cake-baking course, 02/2007	<b>page 11</b>
<b>Photo VI:</b> EZLN Women, 03/2007	<b>page 12</b>
<b>Photo VII:</b> Men riding in La Garrucha, 02/2007	<b>page 14</b>
<b>Photo VIII:</b> Children at the Autonomous School, 02/2007	<b>page 28</b>
<b>Photo IX:</b> Children looking into a Collective Store, 02/2007	<b>page 37</b>
<b>Photo X:</b> Men at the Organic Farming Course, 02/2007	<b>page 43</b>
<b>Photo XI:</b> Bags of corn, 02/2007	<b>page 51</b>
<b>Photo XII:</b> Wall-paintings in a Caracol/ Zapatista Headquarter, 02/2007	<b>page 53</b>
<b>Photo XIII:</b> Workshop for promoters of Organic Farming, 03/2007	<b>page 59</b>
<b>Photo XIV:</b> Signs at Light-poles in a Zapatista Village, 03/3007	<b>page 63</b>
<b>Photo XV:</b> Little Boy Waiting with a Bag of Corn, 02/2007	<b>page 65</b>
<b>Photo XVI:</b> Anonymous Photo of Case Study, NL5, 02/2007	<b>page 67</b>
<b>Photo XVII:</b> Cake-baking Course and a Collective Store, 2/2007	<b>page 69</b>
<b>Photo XVIII:</b> A Family Fetching Firewood with the Donkey, 02/2007	<b>page 77</b>
<b>Photo XIX:</b> Child carried by her Mother, 03/2007	<b>page 79</b>

ALL PHOTOS USED IN THIS PAPER IS TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR, KRISTIN H. TOBIASSEN

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Canjobito
CIEPAC	Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria
CIOAC	Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos
DESMI	Desarrollo Economico y Social de los Mexicanos Indigenas
EZLN	Ejercito Zapatista por Liberación Nacional
GDP	Gross National Product
ICA	International Cooperative Alliance
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labor Organization
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NL	Nueva Libertad
NZ	Nueva Zaqualpa
OXFAM	A development, relief, and campaigning organization ( <a href="http://www.oxfam.org">www.oxfam.org</a> )
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional
TA	Tres Amores
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USA	United States of America
WB	World Bank

## Chapter I:

### Introduction



Chiapas, the most southern state in Mexico, is a place of great natural and cultural wealth and has the largest and most diverse indigenous population in the country. Unfortunately, problems of marginalization and poverty heavily influence the rural indigenous' life. On average, the income for the indigenous population in Chiapas is one third of the income of the non-indigenous (Carrasco, et al, n.d.), and in the nation in total as much as 80.6% of the indigenous population lives in poverty according to World Bank limits (IFAD, 2006). Empowerment can be seen as a social-psychological state of confidence in one's ability to challenge existing relations of domination and state of life. A number of political, historical, journalistic and social-scientific accounts have shown that collective action may engender experiences of empowerment, both for the individual participant and for the collective as a whole.

This is the context that gave roots to the development projects that DESMI – a local non-governmental organization – has started in rural areas of Chiapas. DESMI focuses on supporting collectives and through their work, improve the self-reliance and empower the collective members. This thesis will deal with the experiences of working collectively, and I have through qualitative research methods sought to understand if the projects have led to empowerment for the collective members, how the collective work organization is related to social capital formation, and if this has become means to achieve sustainable development in the communities.

The empirical data are positive in terms of individual empowerment in several power spheres, but the social capital formation and collective actions supporting this have not only been the work collective. The Zapatista Movement - which emerged in Chiapas in the beginning of the 90s- , and their ideology, have been easily traceable in the respondents' appraisal of their collective work and results. Their participation in the movement is also directly and indirectly affecting the individual empowerment processes in the villages of investigation.

#### 1.1. Brief Contextual Overview

The state of Chiapas contains rich natural resources and is one of the largest producers of coffee, livestock, natural gas, petroleum and hydro-electric energy in Mexico. Yet the majority of the profits from these products are held by large companies and wealthy elites.

The rural population suffers from malnutrition, and the state has the highest concentration of poverty in the country. The *campesinos* - rural families of small scale farming- live in constant crisis because they cannot sell their coffee and corn at fair prices. Many remote areas lack basic services - such as roads, schools and health clinics-, and their daily life is mired in poverty. In 2006, approximately 165 persons migrated each day from Chiapas to the United States or North Mexico to seek a better life (Pickard, 2006), but this does nothing to resolve the agricultural crisis. The rural economy needs to be strengthened so that people can sell their products at better prices and improve their conditions without having to leave their home communities.

## **1.2. Desarrollo Económico Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas**

DESMI - *Desarrollo Económico Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas* – is a NGO started in 1969 with the purpose of fighting the extreme marginalization and poverty of indigenous communities in Chiapas. DESMI offers capacity building courses and supports the development of e.g. agricultural collectives and collective stores with the goal of creating an integrated network of producers and consumers as backbone to a stronger rural economy. Their focus lies on assisting with the process, helping farmers in isolated communities see the big picture, promoting the principles of collective solidarity and helping the people of Chiapas to make them their own. The key elements of DESMI's capacity building courses are promoting economic cooperation and community development in coherence with ecological sustainability. It is this grassroots development model that DESMI has come to define as 'Solidarity Economics', in which village groups develop their human, social and economic resources interdependently (DESMI, 2006).

## **1.3. Aims and Research Questions**

The main approach in this thesis is to investigate if and how collective work has led to various processes of individual empowerment for the collective members in villages in rural Chiapas, Mexico.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

### ***Question one***

What part of the collective work is positively affecting the social capital formation?

### ***Question two***

What processes of empowerment are traceable to the participation in collectives?

### ***Question three***

How are the processes of empowerment affected by the social capital formation?

### ***Question four***

How does working collectively and the stock of social capital relate to poverty reduction, project performance and development sustainability in the rural communities in Chiapas?

## **1.4. Personal Motivation**

I have chosen this topic of investigation for two main reasons; I know DESMI's work from an earlier stay in Chiapas, and I like the saying: 'together we are stronger' which I am curious to how can be valid in processes of development and poverty reduction. My research has therefore dealt with processes of empowerment, which members of collectives experience from their work. Crucial theoretical terms and concepts in this thesis are conceptualized to contain elements that are essentially qualitative in nature, which is why qualitative research methodology has been the natural choice for the investigations I will conduct.

Through the 37 years DESMI has worked with economic and social development for the indigenous in Chiapas, they have become well-known over large parts of the state, and I believe their work leaves a great deal to explore. To make this thesis investigation manageable I have had to narrow the geographical focus as to conduct research among the collective members in four villages in what DESMI calls 'The Southern Zone' which is the Venustiano Carranza Municipality in Chiapas. I have also had to narrow the width of my research aim and questions to make the research manageable and expedient.

## **1.5. Definition of Central Terms and Concepts**

Giving a comprehensive definition of poverty is difficult. Poverty is a social construct, so its definition varies according to whoever formulates the concept. However, when referring to poverty and poverty reduction in this thesis I will apply the human capability approach advocated by the UNDP. The human capability concept of poverty focuses on expanding people's opportunities and covers both the physiological and sociological realities of deprivation:

In UNDP documents, there is also an emphasis on empowering the poor, facilitating their participation in society and with it enabling them to move upward on the socioeconomic ladder. The term *empowerment*, or rather, disempowerment, is central in the human capability approach, and it is also central to this thesis study. Often, the poor are too disempowered to rise up above poverty - there is a lack of opportunities and services available to them, and so they remain in the poverty situations:

Empowerment is *the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives* (Narayan, 2002a:p. xviii)

## **1.6. Organization of the Thesis**

The remaining of this thesis is organized into the following chapters:

**Chapter II:** The aim of this chapter is to provide a wider contextual overview over Mexico in general and the state Chiapas in particular.

**Chapter III** follows up the second chapter in presenting the development organization DESMI and the Zapatista Movement, which are both central to the contextual understanding of this study.

**Chapter IV** presents a theoretical background of the study and attempts to lay a solid conceptual foundation for the research.

**Chapter V** contains the methodological framework for the research, and an explanation of the research design applied in the field work.

**Chapter VI** is a brief presentation of the collective work organization in the four villages of investigation, based on empirical data from the field research.

**Chapter VII** further discusses the empirical data from the interviews and observation, classified and analyzed in relation to three propositions about correlations in this study.

**Chapter VIII** brings us to closure with providing the conclusions and recommendations emanating from this research.



## Chapter II: Contextual Overview



### 2.1. Country Profile - Mexico

With the highest per capita income in Latin America, Mexico is firmly established as a middle-income country, but the country still faces huge gaps between rich and poor, north and south, urban and rural. The rate of urbanization has been particularly high in Mexico, and today three out of four persons live in an urban area (INEGI, 2006). Mexico is a federal republic made up of 31 states and one Federal District (Mexico City), occupying all together 756,066 square miles. The country shares a border with the USA to the north, Belize and Guatemala to the south, and is bounded on two of its sides by expanses of water - the Gulf of Mexico to the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west (INEGI, 2006).

The Mexican population of July 2006 was of 107.5 million people, which makes Mexico the 11<sup>th</sup> largest population in the world (CIA, 2006). Numbers from 2003 show that the bottom 40% of the population share only 11% of the wealth and is considered to live below the Mexican poverty line. This is an improvement over 50% since the early 1980s, though because of the population growth it constitutes an increase in absolute numbers (The Economist, 2006). Estimates from 2005 reveal an unemployment rate at 3.6 %, but as many as 25 % as underemployed (GlobalEdge, 2007). The annual population growth has also descended from 2.6 % between 1970 and 1990, to an annual growth of 1.6 % from 1990 to 2005 (UNICEF, 2007).

#### 2.1.1. Economic History – From Restrictions to Liberalization


From the 1950s to the 1970s the Mexican economy witnessed a growth based on an internal development model that protected the economy by restricting imports. However this semi-closed economy was not competitive in international markets and recession was a fact. When the 'petro-dollars' were flooding the world's financial markets in the 1970s, Mexico borrowed heavily. This was the beginning of the dramatic growth in its external debt culminating in being the first country in the world announcing in 1982 that the country was incapable of handling their external debt (Crane, 1995). Since then the country has suffered a series of economic crises. Economic stabilization programs were introduced without positive outcome and from entering into the 1990s, privatization and liberalization characterize the national politics. Nevertheless, most Mexicans were left profoundly disappointed and embittered by the economic events in the country (The Economist, 2006). Today the situation is changed, but unfortunately not for the whole population. The national economic growth stabilized from the end of the 1990s, and the GDP per capita average annual growth was at 1.5 % between 1990 and 2005 (UNICEF, 2007).

### 2.1.2. Political History

The political history of Mexico after the Revolution (1910-1917) is dominated by what has been called the perfect dictatorship - control of all areas of public life by the PRI - Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the Institutional Revolutionary Party). Founded in 1929 they governed without interruption for 72 years, until PAN – Partido de Acción Nacional (The National Action Party) won presidency in 2001, and again in 2006 (Funk & Wagnalls, 2005). During the history and today (even though the situation has improved some), few women or indigenous people have been employed in senior government positions. This reflects discrimination unfortunately typical of the Mexican society. As well as gender-based prejudice, the Mexican society still discriminates between *mestizos* ('mixed race' people with European and indigenous ancestors) and indigenous (the original Americans). The latter are regarded by many *mestizos* as racially inferior.

Figure I: Map of Mexico and Chiapas



 - The striped area on the map implicates the area in where the four villages are located. (Map of Mexico and Chiapas taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4573512.stm>)

## 2.2. The Study Area Profile - Chiapas

Chiapas is a boarder-state to Guatemala in the south. The state inhabits about 4.3 million people, equaling 4.2 % of the total Mexican population (INEGI, 2005). Despite being a rich state in terms of natural resources is particularly the indigenous and rural population suffering from poverty. Statistical studies have established that 24 to 32%<sup>1</sup> of the population belongs to an indigenous group (INEGI, 2005). The general population of Chiapas increases by an average of 2.1% per year, which contributes to a growing demand for land. The state fertility rate is the second highest in the country: 3.47 children per woman and the indigenous population is particularly young: 45.5% of the total indigenous population is between 0 and 14 years old (Secretary of Social Development of the State of Chiapas, 2003, cited in SIPAZ, 2007).

Education has traditionally been an instrument of policies, which seek to 'acculturate' and assimilate the indigenous peoples into the Mexican national culture. This has been suppressing the expression and development of their own culture. However, a large number of indigenous communities have never had access to public education. 38.8% of the indigenous population 15 and older never received formal education. Only 11% finished primary (elementary) school, 19.9% of 6 to 14 year-olds currently do not attend school, and 36.5% does not speak Spanish at all (SIPAZ, 2007).



**Photo III: The Sumidero Canyon in Tuxtla, Chiapas**

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<sup>1</sup> The percentages vary according to the criteria used in the investigation. One approach establishes visible criteria such as speaking an indigenous language or wearing traditional dress, while other studies prioritize one's self-identification as indigenous

Due to its geographical position, Chiapas harbors a large diversity of animals and vegetation and has today more protected natural areas than any other state in Mexico. Chiapas is also an important state not only for the petroleum which it already produces, but also for its oil reserves which have not yet been exploited. About half of the national production of natural gas is done in Chiapas, and about 30 % of the surface water in Mexico in total is situated in Chiapas. The largest river, Grijalva River, generates more than 50 % of the country's hydroelectric power (SIPAZ, 2007).

Chiapas is an agricultural state, and the small-scale agriculture and *campesino*- lifestyle (small-scale farmers) is important to conserve the indigenous identity and traditions and many fear that the plural indigenous cultures will die out if they get forced into other forms of labor or become urbanized (Nash, 1995). Most *campesinos* in Chiapas make their living from very small pieces of agricultural land. The last decades the driving form of agricultural production has been intensive cultivation methods from the influence of the neo-liberal market strategy of specialization (Fraser and Restrepo Estrada, 1996). Unfortunately this has not given them any comparative advantages in the Mexican market, or in the international for that matter.

When Mexico entered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the government pronounced that the country was entering the 'First World' on a par with its new free-trade partners, Canada and USA. Unfortunately the new horizon of opportunity and prosperity has not been so bright for large part of the rural population in Chiapas. NAFTA's impact on agriculture in the state has been devastating, and numbers from 2004 shows that the national minimum wage since entering NAFTA had lost 20 % of its purchasing power. This has been particularly hard on the indigenous people who constitute large part of the subsistence farmers in the Chiapas (Fraser and Restrepo Estrada, 1996). A lot of genetically engineered corn from abroad has flooded the market and this is pushing the prices to such a low level that the indigenous producers cannot sell their yield for a price that can feed their families.

### ***2.2.1. Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of the Four Villages***

The four villages investigated during the research for this thesis is located in the south of Chiapas, near the small town Villa las Rosas and the city Comitán de Domínguez. Nueva Libertad (NL), Tres Amores (TA) and Canjobito (CA) are located in areas where corn farming is the typical production, while Nueva Zaqualpa (NZ) is located in a lower area with warmer climate where also sugar production is leading.

**Nueva Libertad** is populated with 109 families and shared between them a total of 1004 hectare of land, owned as an *ejido*<sup>2</sup>. The village is situated close to the large farm El Aguaje, where the ancestors of today's residents worked as 'slaves' before they broke loose and achieved own land. The village has experienced severe division between the families due to political disagreements and conflicts due to questions about land ownership. Today, 29 of the families are organized as Zapatistas.

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<sup>2</sup> An ejido is a collective group of people that live and work on a determined piece of property as a community (Connell, DW, 1998, Retrieved June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, from <http://www.mexicolaw.com.mx/ejido.html> )



**Nueva Zaqualpa** is the newest village among the four and consists today of a cultural mix of people from different places in Chiapas who bought the land from the landowner in the beginning of the 1990s. They are 20 families living there now, where three families are earlier from the village Zaqualpa and speak Spanish. Eleven families are from Morelia and have Tzeltal as their mother tongue, and the last six are from Huixtan in the Highlands and speak Tzotzil. Only the six Tzotzil families are organized with the Zapatista movement.

What today is the little village **Canjobito** was earlier a part of the great ranch called Canjob. Beginning with the agrarian reforms in the 1940s, the ranch was split up in smaller parts and sold out. One of the buyers was don Modesto Pérez who bought 528 hectares of land, equivalent of what today constitute the centre of Canjobito and some neighboring villages, and he shared it between his eight sons and daughters. They have again sold land to others. Today this village has only 12 families, whereas two are Zapatistas.

The ancestors of the population of **Tres Amores** came from three families who worked at the ranch El Aguaje (which today is the village Nueva Libertad). In the 1940s, three men bought 308 hectares of the land which today is Tres Amores ("The three loved ones"). First they run their land as three individuals, but in response to hard times they united their land. Their families grew, and with them grew a conscience of collectivity. Today, 32 families live in Tres Amores, and 20 of the families are today organized with the Zapatista movement.

## Chapter III:

### Desmi and the Zapatista Movement

#### 3.1. The Development NGO – DESMI



**Photo IV: The DESMI logo**

(<http://www.laneta.apc.org/desmiac/>)

Founded in 1969, Desarrollo Económico Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas (Socio-Economic Development of Indigenous Mexicans), or DESMI, is one of the oldest and most reputable community-based organizations in Chiapas. The NGO was founded by Samuel Ruiz – at that time the bishop in the dioceses of San Cristobal – , and the objective was to combat the extreme marginalization and poverty of indigenous communities.

In the beginning their activities covered large parts of Mexico, but from 1972 it converted into a local organization in Chiapas. In the beginning their work principally involved being an intermediate for the US Catholic Relief Services, but when Jorge Santiago became general director in 1974 they increased the rate of their own projects and reformed their organizational structure to better meet the needs of the indigenous communities. DESMI continued being supported by the dioceses of San Cristobal, but with less direct connections. The organization received increasing support from international development agencies as OXFAM (England), Entraide et Fraternité (Belgium), Peace (Canada) and Bread for the World (USA/Germany). From 1979 they started what has been called “el Fondo Revolvente” – the Circulate Fund - to offer small loans with very low interest for collective purposes and cooperatives in the villages of Chiapas.

DESMI now works in 240 communities in the North, Highlands and Central Valleys of Chiapas and provides financial, organizational and technical assistance to help community groups carry out their own projects and work together in resolving community needs. DESMI supports the development of indigenous collectives of e.g. corn and coffee production or opening local grocery stores with the goal of creating an integrated network of producers and consumers as backbone to a strong rural economy. DESMI works with any community, Zapatista or non-, which desires social change and they have assisted coffee-, cattle-, corn- and artisans-cooperatives to organize and get their goods to market. Their focus lies on assisting with local development processes, promoting the principles of Solidarity Economics and help the villagers to make it on their own.

*"An Economy of Solidarity is based on the liberation of human potential, integration of ecology as part of the culture and democracy as a daily practice, leading to the development of a fair society." (DESMI, 2001)*

### **3.1.1. The Work Organization**

DESMI's work is organized into five regional development committees – *Comité de Desarrollo* -, which constitute the connecting link between the organization and the approximately 240 collectives in 17 municipalities (DESMI, 2006). Each committee has their *responsables* (responsible leaders) who the villages contact to deliver their applications and who follow them up and assure a continuous flow of information between the villages and DESMI.



**Photo V:**  
**Cake-baking**  
**course in Tres**  
**Lagunas**

The core of DESMI's work in rural areas of Chiapas is capacity building courses and small loans to collective purposes. DESMI only provides loans to already existing rural collectives or to people who want to start up a collective. The groups have to apply to DESMI with a description of how they plan to organize the work load, and a future plan for the outcome of the collective work.

DESMI offers a range of courses to the associated collectives. In addition to some basic courses that all collectives receive, they can also contact the organization through the *responsables* and ask for specific coursing that they feel the need for. The basic courses are about accounting, work organizing, and problem solving. The latest years, intensive training in sustainable agricultural methods has also been offered to all of the rural collectives. Additional courses that are especially popular are alimentation for pigs, how to avoid and cure sickness between chickens or other domestic animals, vaccination of animals, how to make organic fertilizers, and cake baking courses for women.

### 3.2. The Zapatista Movement

Chiapas is world-known for being the site for where the Zapatista National Liberation Army – ‘Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)’ - chose to start their rebellion. They started their revolution on the first of January, 1994 to coincide with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which they saw as a death sentence for all the small farmers, and especially the indigenous in Mexico (Chomsky, 1999). They fight for the implementation of indigenous rights in accordance with the ILO Convention 169 that Mexico has signed, and their demands are summed up on the EZLN Communiqué of June 12, 1994; “*Work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace*” (Chomsky, 1999, University of Texas, 1997).



**Photo VI: EZLN Women**

*“We are those who have to wear mask to be seen, we are those who need to carry weapons to be heard” (EZLN, [www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org))*

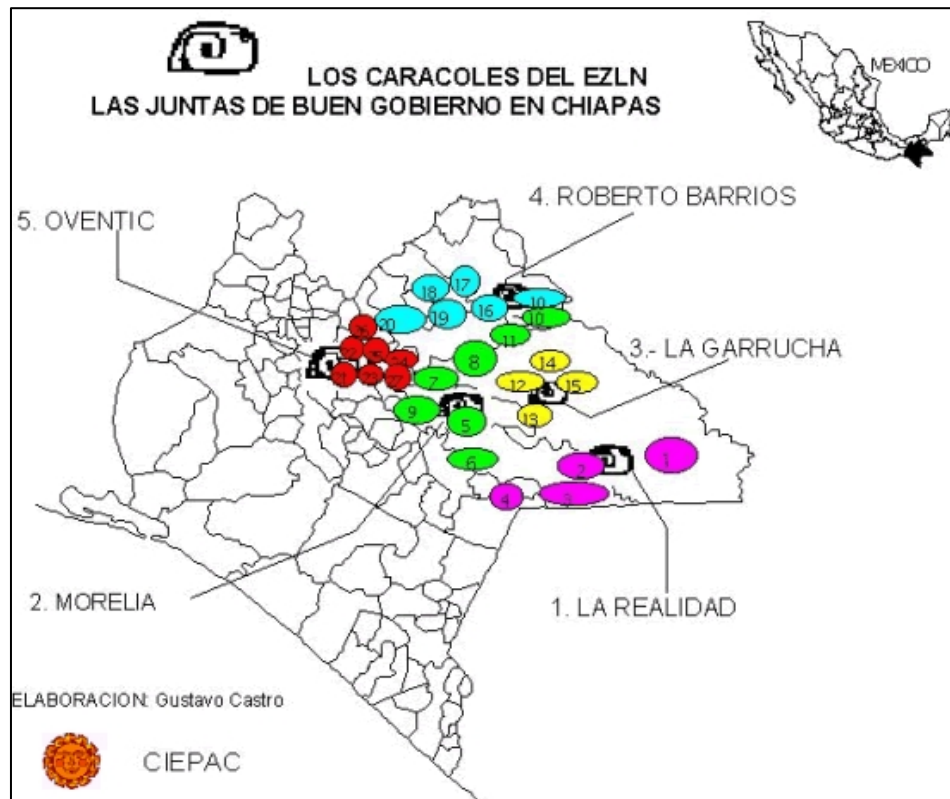
#### 3.2.1. Zapatista Ideology – ‘Solidarity in the age of Globalization’

While the Zapatista demands echo many of the demands of other revolutionary groups in Latin America, the Zapatistas Movement is also different than many other guerrilla counterparts around the world. Behind the revolt there is the idea that “even though we are poor farmers, if we stay together we are strong”. Their program is less about developing the poor through economic distribution than about socializing the poor to think about themselves in new ways, for example, as active, rational, and responsible for solving their own problems (Luccisano, 2004, cited in Mora, 2007: p.68). The movement is built on grassroot democracy as all villages and members are taking part in decisions regarding its politics and path forward. Any member regardless of gender can become militant for the EZLN, or education promoter and health promoter at their many collectively run autonomous schools and clinics. There are five Zapatista Headquarters around Chiapas, called ‘Caracoles’. This is where they arrange meetings, events and courses, and where the five Zapatista governments, called *Juntas* are situated. All villages that have Zapatistas belong to one of these headquarters. Each Junta consists of between 10-15 members and they change every ten days so that everyone can participate in the government (Stahler-Sholk, 2007: p.57).

The Zapatistas ideology is hard to define in simple terms. They are anti-patriarchal and stand for the rights of self-determination for all people, including the indigenous peoples. The Zapatistas’ struggle is nationalistic because it involves restoring pride and dignity in the indigenous populations. The struggle is socialist because it seeks to take back the land being exploited by the rich and powerful and give it back to the indigenous people to



farm (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). The fight is anti-neo-liberalist because it is firmly against the current system of exploitation caused by world economics, and it is one of dignity because it is trying to preserve the history of Mexico by not allowing the destruction of the indigenous people and their culture (Vanden, 2007; Mora, 2007). They state to fight for solidarity in the age of globalization (EZLN, 2007).



**Figure II:** Map of the five 'Caracoles'/Zapatista Headquarters in Chiapas, and the areas belonging to each headquarter (source: CIEPAC, <http://www.ciepac.org/mapas/militares/> Retrieved May 16th 2007)

## Chapter IV: Theories and Prior Research



This chapter introduces the theoretical assumptions guiding this study and is organized into three parts. *Part I* is a brief presentation of prior studies and empirical findings on the relationships between the collective actions, social capital, empowerment and poverty reduction. *Part II* begins with a short overview of the **alternative development paradigm** and of the **people-centred development** approach. The alternative development theory embodies various development concepts and strategies and one of these - which constitute the crux of the matter for this thesis study - is **empowerment**. The concept of empowerment has become well-known in a range of research disciplines, and part II will present the empowerment theories related to the development discourse, closely followed by theories of **social capital**, and **collective actions**. *Part III* introduces the operationalization of the two main concepts for analyzing the fieldwork data, namely social capital and empowerment. The chapter ends with a **presentation of the three main propositions** made based on the presented prior research and theories. These propositions will be discussed in chapter VII, in relation to the empirical data on processes of empowerment and the stock of social capital and the overall project performance.

### PART I - Prior Studies and Empirical Findings

J. Kroeker (1995) has conducted extensive research on empowerment and Nicaraguan agricultural cooperatives, which shows that they represent settings that foster aspects of personal, organizational and societal levels of empowerment. His findings also revealed that cooperative work laid a foundation for enhanced feeling of self-efficiency and control over own future among the members. The cooperatives provided various structures for the members to participate in decisions regarding their future development and state. When it comes to the crucial aspect of increasing the level of participation as empowerment, Kroeker's study showed that the members often expressed that they felt they had the right to participate, but many never exercised that right. Even in the cooperatives, most members still lacked self-confidence and had fear of speaking in meetings (Kroeker, 1995).

Studies conducted by Jonathan Fox (1997: pp.124) highlight the importance of the organizations whose efforts create opportunities for others to engage in collective actions and the production of social capital as important to rural empowerment and the political

construction in Mexico. He argues that organizing in regional organizations is important for the rural population because of the ability to represent their interests, to overcome locally confined solidarities, achieve more bargaining power, and better access information (Fox, 1997:p.126).

The International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) 2005 review highlights the positive relation between participation, social capital formation and empowerment. Their review report found that development projects in which the rate of participation was high had been most successful at improving the circumstances of poor communities and promoting empowerment for the participants. They also found strong relations between the social capital formation and people's empowerment in their development projects (IFAD, 2005). Further, the link between social capital formation and agricultural cooperative movements is explored by Svendsen and Svendsen (2004) in *The Creation and Destruction of Social Capital*. This is a historical research on cooperative movements in Denmark and Poland from the nineteenth century, and it reveals a strong connection between social capital formation and the enhancement of economic growth and educational standards of the rural population. The historical evidence illustrates that inclusive network cooperation – based on social capital as trust and regular face-to-face interaction – had been a crucial mean for the small farmers' ability to survive (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: p. 47). As capitalism developed and larger companies both sold goods to and bought product from the small farmers, it left them with a relatively small bargaining power to protect themselves from exploitation and poverty. A counter-reaction to this was to group together to gain strength and pool their selling power. By the end of the nineteenth century, network cooperation had spread to large parts of rural Denmark and a valuable stock of social capital had been formed through the cooperative movements (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: p.52). The two Svendsens traced the stock of social capital in the form of farmers' cooperatives established in a bottom-up process in the nineteenth century, the process of sustaining these resources during the early twentieth century, and how this has been a process of empowering the Danish farmers not only to survive, but also to foster entrepreneurial activity and economic growth.

## **PART II Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1. Alternative Development Theory**

The roots and emergence of the alternative development paradigm must be searched for in the economic development debate of the 1960s and the 1970s. The dissatisfaction with 'traditional' top-down approaches and the modernization view of development gave root to the alternative development theory, which advocates more generalized improvement or development of community residents, than the 'traditional' focus on market efficiency. With the alternative development path, the civil society gained force together with an emergence of new social movements (Friedman, 1992: p.1). According to Pieterse (2001), alternative development theory has been concerned with redefining the goals of development and introducing alternative practices, including participatory and people-centred development approaches.

The philosophy of alternative development rests on the belief that the rural poor should actively participate in the decision making of territorially organized communities. The Dag Hammarskjöld's Foundation's 1975 report states that an alternative or 'another' development is geared to the satisfaction of needs, being endogenous and self-reliant (Dag Hammarskjöld's Foundation, 1975). Friedman (1992: p.33) further argues that the alternative development must be seen as a process that seeks the empowerment of households and their individual members through their own involvement in socially and politically relevant actions. These approaches gained enormous popularity among grassroot-based development agents (like e.g. NGOs), even though the critics argued that alternative development theory is not more than loosely connected alternative approaches to development, like e.g. community development, participatory development, and 'trickle-up approaches' (Pieterse, 2001: p.81).

*"Human survival depends on a community-based, people-centered alternative beyond the failed extremist ideologies of communism and capitalism"*  
(David Korten, cited in PCDF, 2007)

#### **4.1.1. The People Centred Development Approach**

The People-Centred Development (PCD) approach is the basis of the alternative development thinking, and it was pushed by the new social movements and leftwing academics. The approach aroused through the question; must development agenda be market-centred, state-centred or, can it alternatively, be people-centred? Friedman (1992) describes a moral justification for people-centred development, in harmony with the environment. He sustains his argumentation affirming that to be people-centred is to focus on the basic needs of the people, basically food, water and shelter; and in order to be in harmony with the environment, the planetary sustainability should be respected, and therefore growth should be limited.

The components integral to a people centred approach include:

- Popular participation in development
- The need for sustainable development
- The support and advocacy of the people's role in development by the bureaucracy, NGOs and voluntary organizations.

David Korten, president of the People-Centered Development Forum ([www.pcdf.org](http://www.pcdf.org)) describes the process of people-centred development as when the members of society manage to increase their potential and institutional capabilities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life, and in consistence with their own aspirations (Monaheng, 2001).

The PCD approach, unlike the classical western approaches, places the community at the centre stage of development. Within this context, development practitioners simply play the role of facilitators, while the communities take control of the implementation of their own projects (Centre on Human Policy, Syracuse University, 2006). It is a bottom-up approach that views the communities as people with potential and with the capacity to

manage their own development. Above all, it encourages involvement of all stakeholders relevant to the development process. It further recognizes the skills and resources of the local people as well as the utilization of external resources. Eventually the ultimate goal is empowerment, self-reliance, and community ownership and project sustainability (Monaheng, 2001, Friedman, 1992).

#### ***4.1.2. Capacity-building and Participation to People-Centred Development***

Capacity-building is an integral part of several development theories and practices, and a central part of the alternative development path. The UN Earth Summit recognized capacity-building as one of the means of implementation for sustainable development and the Agenda 21. The aspect of capacity building is linked to empowerment and it can be characterized as the approach to community development or PCD development that raises people's knowledge, awareness and skills to use their own capacity. This enables the beneficiaries to understand the decision-making process and to communicate more effectively at different levels and stages (Monaheng, 2001).

Building capacities is seen as investing in people and it's a transfer of know-how and capital. The capacity building strategy should include a participatory approach to ensure that the priorities and capacity building needs of the people are addressed. Capacity building is not only about learning new things, but about enabling people to build on the capacities they already possess. Aid agencies that ignore people's existing strengths may create dependency, and so make people more vulnerable than before. In relation to poverty reduction, local problems of limited resources and marginalization can better be overcome with collective community actions, and building the capacities to do so can be enhanced with strong social capital (Narayan et al 2002b: p.15; Villanger and Enes, 2004: p.6).

The PCD approach stresses the participation of the majority, especially the up to that time excluded components such as women, youth and the illiterate, in the process of development (Roodt, 2001: p.474). According to (Monaheng, 2001), the people centred development strategy builds on the participatory and learning process approaches. They seek to involve ordinary people at grassroots' level of the local community, give them the opportunity to participate in projects, and obtain the capacity to plan, implement and manage their own development. The local people are seen as active participants, not passive recipients of charity, and the utilization of their knowledge and value systems in the program implementation is seen as a basis for empowerment and ownership of the development process. The aim of these approaches is to enable the communities to build their own capacity, self-reliance and ensure sustainable development in harmony with the environment (Pieterse, 2001: p.75; Monaheng, 2001).

Oakley (1991) argues that people's participation in development projects increases the effectiveness. Particularly in rural areas are the participatory approaches for the goal achievements. When involving people in every step of the development projects, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the projects are bound to be more effective and sustainable, as there is better chance of reaching their objectives and make it lasting.

#### 4.1.3. Social and Solidarity Economics

Within the ‘trickle-up’ approaches to economy, one often talks about social or solidarity economics. These approaches are directed at economy, but the primary focus lays at achieving enough growth as to enable the beneficiaries to fulfill their basic needs. The fight for solidarity economics has been pushed by leftwing academics, opposing that the markets are being articulated as the final arbiter to address environmental, legal, social and political issues (Friedman, 1992:p.1). The philosophy behind the solidarity economics poses a contra-position against the traditional economic system too focused on market efficiency. Table I illustrates a comparison between the principles of solidarity economics and the reality of the world governing neo-liberal economics:

**Table I: A Comparison between the Neo-Liberal Economy and the Solidarity Economy**

	<b>Neo-liberal Economy</b>	<b>Solidarity Economy</b>
<b>The role of work</b>	Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfy needs</li> <li>• Self-realization as a person</li> </ul>
<b>Work organization</b>	Hierarchal form, the owners are the employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic</li> <li>• Contributed by the association</li> <li>• Decisions made in assembly</li> <li>• As a culture</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	Substitution of the human workload	An instrument for the work
<b>The production</b>	For the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-consume</li> <li>• Inter- exchange</li> <li>• Market</li> </ul>
<b>The market</b>	Controlled by large enterprises and the world banks	Controlled by the producers and the consumers according to real necessities
<b>The money</b>	Merchandise power	Mean for exchange
<b>Relations</b>	Domination	Cooperation and power construction

(Source: DESMI, 2001: p.97-98)

## 4.2. The Sustainability Concept

Sustainability is an economic, social, and environmental concept. The sustainability idea as we know it emerged in a series of meetings and reports in 1980s, and it was the Brundtland Commission that introduced the concept into the development discourse in 1987. The term serves today as a framework under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructures, protect and enhance the quality of life, protect the environment and create new businesses to strengthen their economies.

The meaning and implications of sustainability have been interpreted in many ways, but there is broad agreement on some basic components that have important implications for development design and practice. For example, sustainability considerations clearly include socio-economic as well as biophysical matters and are especially concerned with the interrelations between and interdependency of the two. That means not just that human as well as ecological effects must be addressed but also that these two must be considered as parts of large complex systems (UNEP, 2002: p. 8-11).

*Sustainable development is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs -*  
The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development - (UN, 2007).

## 4.3. Empowerment Theories

Since the late 1970s and through the Alternative Development paradigm, the buzz word in most of the NGO development interventions has been the concept of empowerment. The word 'empower' can be translated with 'to give power' or 'to enable' and the term empowerment refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and actions to shape one's own life (Narayan, 2002a: p.1). Empowerment has become a construct used by a variety of social scientists relating to people with disabilities and within health care in general, but its' popularity in relation to the development discourse stems from how poor people have their freedom of choices severely reduced by their powerlessness and lack of voice, particularly in relation to the state and market (Narayan, 2002a: p. 1-2; Conger and Kanungo, 1988: p. 471). The empowering approach is investing in the future and the sustainability of the development projects. For example can social empowerment promote social cohesion and trust, which are qualities important to project performance and the provision of a promotional environment for development effectiveness and quality (Narayan, 2002a: p.2).

The most common definition of empowerment used today is "*the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives*" (Narayan, 2002a: p.xviii)

With reference to empowerment as possession and exercise of power, Friedman (1992: p.33) identifies three kinds of power relations:

- 1) **Social power** – concerned with access to certain bases of household production such as information, knowledge and skills, participation in social organizations and financial resources.
- 2) **Political power** – concerns the access of individual household members to the process by which decisions, particularly those that affect their own future are made.
- 3) **Psychological power** – described as an individual sense of potency demonstrated in self confident behavior and is often a result of successful action in the social or political domain.

#### ***4.3.1. Expansion of Assets and Capabilities***

The word empowerment is not so easily translated into the world's many languages, but there exists a range of terms associated, which include e.g. self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, life in dignity in accordance with one's values, capacity to fight for one's rights and capability (Narayan et al, 2002b: p. 15). Empowerment is a concept of complexity and is seen as critical not only as an end in itself. When empowerment is seen as expansion of assets and capabilities in an analysis, it is important to include the multidimensionality of poverty situations and therefore a range of different assets and capabilities needed at the individual and the collective level. At individual level they can be health, education and housing, while at the collective level they can be the ability to organize and mobilize to take collective action to solve problems. Empowering people therefore means to remove barriers of formal or informal institutional character which prevent them from improving their situation, like e.g. formal laws or regulations, or informal norms of solidarity and sharing (Narayan, 2002a:pp. xix). Empowerment can be a key for quality of life and human dignity, good governance, pro-poor growth and project effectiveness and improved service delivery (Narayan, 2002a: pp. 8).

#### ***4.3.2. Building Capacities and Skills for Empowerment***

The recent empowerment discourse focuses on building capacities and strategizing to achieve social and economic improvement at different scales. Amartya Sen (1999: p.87) contributes to the discourse propositions for understanding individual welfare through the use of 'the capability approach'. He stresses empowerment as the process of developing individual capacities through education and skills in order to empower individuals to fight for a better quality of life. Sen (1999) sees individual poverty as capability deprivation, and capacity building through basic education and development of skills is therefore a means to individual empowerment and to poverty alleviation. He further argued that enhancing people's capabilities expands their freedoms to choose the kind of life they wish to lead and therefore a much clearer process of real people's empowerment.

Empowerment strategies imply more participatory and bottom-up approaches to development objectives to succeed. These approaches to poverty reduction are grounded in the conviction that poor people themselves are invaluable partners for development, since they are the most motivated to move out of poverty (Narayan, 2002a: pp.7).



#### **4.3.3. Critiques of the Empowerment Literature**

There is today a large cross-disciplinary literature on the links between empowerment and poverty reduction, and from being a buzz word in the alternative circle of acquaintances, prominent development agencies from the neo-liberal corner, like e.g. the World Bank, have adopted the empowerment approaches. The World Bank has even devoted an own website to empowerment issues<sup>3</sup> and sponsored a great deal of published research on empowerment and poverty alleviation efforts. Riger (1993, cited in Saegert and Winkel, 1996) has identified two shortcomings of the empowerment literature after it has become adopted by the large development agents guided by neo-liberal ideology; Firstly, that it reveals an overemphasis on feelings of efficacy with a neglect of the achievement of real power. Secondly, that the literature emphasizes on autonomy and empowerment of the pure individual, at the expense of recognition of the importance of community and the collective empowerment.

#### **4.4. Theories of Social Capital**

The concept of social capital got its real breakthrough with the sociologist James S. Coleman who finally established the term on the intellectual agenda in the late 1980s. He was the first to define social capital as “*people’s ability to cooperate in achieving common goals*” (Putnam, 2002: p.5). Today social capital is linked to social, economic, medical and political research, and it is given that some kind of social capital encompasses the social relationships that facilitate collective actions and contribute to economic and institutional development (Fox and Gershman, 2001:p.400, Grootaert, 2004:p.25).

Social capital is increasingly recognized as a critical resource to the poor, some even call it one of the few sources of capital actually available to them (Fox and Gershman, 2001: p.399). Social capital concerns norms and networks, the values people hold, and the resources that they can access. This is both to be seen as resulting in and the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships (Edwards, 2004: p.305). The term ‘capital’ is usually understood as an element in production, in particular the production of goods or services. Social capital is also productive and makes possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable without it (Coleman, 1990, cited in Inkeles, 2001: p.247).

Robert Putnam’s theories have become particularly influential in the social capital debate, and he poses social capital as a distinct form of ‘public good’ embodied in civic engagement and which can have a knock-on effect on economic prosperity (Putnam, 1993, 2000, cited in Edwards, 2004: pp.306). For Putnam (2002: pp.7) social capital fosters norms of reciprocity, and facilitates information flows for mutual benefits and trust.

*“Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/empowerment>

*individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2002:p.7).*

Putnam explains the norms of reciprocity by the example that if you show goodwill and do something for others, you will not expect anything in return immediately because you are comforted with the belief that down the road someone will reciprocate the goodwill when you need it. The norms of reciprocity are closely connected with trust, and as Putnam puts it; *‘trustworthiness lubricates social life’* (Putnam, 2002:p.7). He points at how a society can achieve the room to develop and to accomplish more when not having to balance every exchange instantly.

#### ***4.4.1. Social Capital Formation and the Socio-Cultural Glue***

According to Putnam (2002), social capital can be produced by local societal actors, but also by governments, NGOs and external actors in the civil society, both in combination and in isolation. Svendsen and Svendsen (2004: p.28) argue that social capital particularly grows out of small group activity where face-to-face interaction generates common social norms. Research shows that different results emerge from the three distinct pathways of co-production, especially in relation to societal ‘thickness’ which seem most attainable from below (Fox, 1997:p.120). Social capital can be seen as thick or thin, vertical and horizontal (Putnam, 2002:p.10). ‘Thick’ social capital means that the social networks are closely interwoven and multithreaded, e.g. with those you meet everyday, those who are closest to you. ‘Thin’ social capital on the other side is almost invisible connections, e.g. a nod to someone you occasionally meet at the supermarket (Putnam, 2002:p.10, Fox, 1997:p.120).

Social capital has become central in recent years’ debates on development issues, as a sort of socio-cultural ‘glue’ which binds the communities together in their fight for both political and economic progress (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:p. 255). Lack of trust makes people turn their back on their neighbor and become introverted. This eliminates the societies’ security networks and coping mechanisms in hard times. Several analyses have been conducted to test whether social capital underpin economic development and poverty alleviation programs, and the studies generally identify positive correlations between social capital and local development processes (Mohan and Stokke, 2000: p.255). Brown and Ashman found that when strengthening the stock of social capital, it positively affected intersectoral cooperation and local problem solving in 13 cases of multiparty cooperation across Africa and Asia (Mohan and Stokke, 2000: p.255).

#### ***4.4.2. Social Capital in Development***

Research evidence (Hofstede and Inglehart, cited in Inkles, 2001: p.10-12) from more than 40 nations show a strong connection between certain social attitudes and values, such as individualism and materialism, and certain features of socio-political and economic organization. Especially the correlations between social capital and levels of income equality are indisputable strong. Grootaert’s (cited in Gillinson, 2004: p. 26) studies have also demonstrated that social capital is not just positive factors for the poor, but that in developing countries the stock of social capital shows the benefit of making

e.g. microcredit projects and water projects more effective. Research published by Ritzen, Easterly and Woolcock (2000, cited in Narayan, 2002a: p. 4) and Knack and Keefer (1997, cited in Narayan, 2002a: p.4) have established a strong relationship between economic growth and various measures of trust and civic cooperation.

Another benefit of social capital in poverty reduction is that it ensures a safety net which guarantees more stability in the development processes (Woolcock and Narayan, cited in Putnam, 2002: p.6). The idea of social capital as 'safety net' is that a person's family or friends constitute important assets which can be called on in crisis, enjoyed for its own sake and leveraged for material gain. Communities blessed with a diverse stock of social capital and hereby lasting social networks are in stronger positions to confront problems of poverty and vulnerability, to resolve disputes among its citizens and take advantage of new economic opportunities together (Woolcock and Narayan, cited in Putnam, 2002: p.6; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: p.48). Social capital contributes to economic prosperity and sustainability, and the concept also applies to the wider political and social environment in which communities exist. The core idea of the theories of social capital is simple; *social networks matter*.

#### **4.5. Theories of Collective Actions**

The social and economic history of the world records innumerable cases of individuals on all continents utilizing collective action to address common social and economic problems by forming cooperatives. As small scale farmers faced obstacles of capitalism and the large companies which were in position to exploit them in the nineteenth century (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: p.48), today's individualist market philosophy has created huge social inequalities because of differential access to scarce resources. This has brought a resurgence of attention towards collective formation among today's marginalized and rural poor as to increase their power together (Merrett and Walzer, 2004: p.xii).

Collective actions arise when the efforts of two or more individuals are needed to achieve an outcome (Sandler, 2004: p. 17; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004: p.4), and supporters of the cooperative production approaches justify their importance by pointing to the significant roles economic and community development have played over the past two centuries. Cooperatives can be found in various levels of the society, but the focus in this paper lies on the matter of smaller rural cooperatives.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) defines cooperatives as "*an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise*" (Fairbaum, 2004: pp. 24, cited in Merret and Walzer, 2004). The cooperatives are commonly recognized by structures emphasizing member ownership, member control and member benefit. Cooperatives don't fit into a streamlined concept but must be addressed and defined by their diversity, both as a matter of strategy, purpose, and connections to the community. The diversity relates to the fact that they have emerged in

different geographical surroundings, economic sectors, or time periods (Fairbaum, 2004: p. 24, cited in Merret and Walzer, 2004).

#### **4.5.1. Why Cooperate? The ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’**

Bentley and Schlozman (cited in Gillinson, 2004) argue that we should cooperate because it is socially optimal to do so. Why is illustrated by the famous ‘Prisoners Dilemma’ game.

##### **The Prisoner’s Dilemma**

*“Two criminals have been arrested on suspicion of a crime and are thrown into prison in two separate cells. Both prisoners can choose either to cooperate (deny everything) or defect (confess to the crime and implicate the other person). The prison officers cannot arrest either of them without the confession of one or both so they attempt to cut a deal: - If one confess, the confessor will be set free and the one who kept quiet will get the harshest possible sentence. - If both confess, they will both go to jail, but with commuted sentences as reward for cooperation. - But also, both of them know that without any confessions the police will be forced to let them go” (Gillinson, 2004: p.9)*

The ‘dilemma’ faced by the prisoners here is that, whatever the other does, each is better off confessing than remaining silent. But the outcome obtained when both confess is worse for each than the outcome they would have obtained had both remained silent. A common view is that the puzzle illustrates a conflict between individual and group rationality. A group whose members pursue rational self-interest may all end up worse off than a group whose members act contrary to rational self-interest and have cooperative interests at heart.

#### **4.5.2. Costs and Benefits of Collective Actions – The Free Rider Problem**

After a long period where the cooperative unit of work has been spoken of in the same breath as corruption and inefficiency, cooperatives may be resurgent in poor countries that undergo liberalization and privatization (Reardon and Barrett, 2000, cited in Kristiansen, 2006: p. 19). Cooperatives and collective actions involve strategic interactions where choices and consequences are dependent on one’s own actions and those of others (Sandler, 2004: p.xi). By its nature, collective actions involve interdependency among individuals and strategic interrelations among them. To achieve efficient and lasting collaboration between people depends not only on shared experience and learning, but also on their level of commitment to the collective goals and on mutual trust (Argoth and McGrath, 1993, Dogheson, 1993, Parkhe, 1993, cited in Røkholt, 2000: p.13). Cooperation should be enhanced within a society because of its profits of creating social capital (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004).

The individual empowerment obtained by collective actions is associated with their participation. Political economy theory proposes that individuals choose to participate in collective actions depending on the cost and benefits of participation (Prestby et al, 1990:

p.119). It is thereby argued that the benefits must be “selective” in that they specifically reward members for their individual contribution and are only obtainable by those who participate. If this is not the case the cooperatives can suffer loss due to the ‘free rider – problem’, where non-members/participants can receive the same collective benefit as those participating. This may result in lower collective activity and even breakdown of the cooperatives (Olson, 1965, cited in Prestby et al, 1990: p.120).

## **PART III Operationalization of key concepts**

The two key concepts in this research are **empowerment** and **social capital**, but they are both broad and non-tangible, which therefore require an operationalization to facilitate measurement and analysis. Based on the theoretical assumptions on these concepts and the prior research and findings, I will present some propositions which have guided this study, and which I will discuss in relation to my empirical findings in chapter VII.

### **4.6. Empowerment – ‘Participation’**

At the personal level, empowerment bears on the acquirement of access to resources psychical and physical. On the material side these goals can be to meet immediate and concrete needs and eradicate symptoms of poverty, while psychological goals can be to increase feelings of value, self-efficacy and control over one’s life situation (Freire, 1970, cited in Dugan, 2003). Empowerment by self-mobilization can be seen as where people participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems and control their own lives. Participation stresses the intrinsic and instrumental value of cooperation, trust building and problem resolution (Carroll, 2001:p.25), and in this study I will use the extent of participation as a measurement of empowerment. I have chosen to use the **appearance and extent of participation** to operationalize empowerment because I see participation to be a good image of the expansion of freedom and capabilities. Dynamically, participatory processes can also lead to accumulation of social capital at the same time as social capital builds up and is maintained by participatory activities (Carroll, 2001: p.25).

I will define participation as “*the voluntary contribution by people in various projects or events; social, economical or political*”. Participation will be seen as an active process, implying that the person or group in question takes initiatives and asserts his/her or its autonomy to do so. I will count participation in the various courses and projects advocated by DESMI, and the general participation in cooperatives, collective actions, social organizations, social events, religious events, and political organizations. The respondents will be asked about all the meetings and events they have participated in the last six months, and whether they had been active in preparing or organizing these events, or if they just showed up.

### **4.7. Social Capital – ‘Social Networks’**

Villager and Enes (2004: p.12) have made an attempt to summarize how social capital has been measured in recent studies of poverty reduction, and the study shows a variation from simply counting the number of social networks to using the household’s

membership in diverse groups at two different years. I have chosen to operationalize social capital in this thesis by **the presence and form of social networks**, which is classified by three characteristics:

1) *Number of relations*

Quantity of relationships is maybe the most obvious and most frequently used variable. Argued by Biussevain (1974, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p. 1154), the actual number of relationships simply is the most important network property.

2) *Strength of ties*

Strength can be seen as the density of the relationship, as e.g. the “thick” and “thin” social capital as argued by Robert Putnam (2002). The strength of the relationships influence the trust building of social capital (Johannisson, 1996, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p.1154) and the strength can be measured by how long a relationship has lasted, how often they meet, and the degree of acquaintance between the two actors in the relationship.

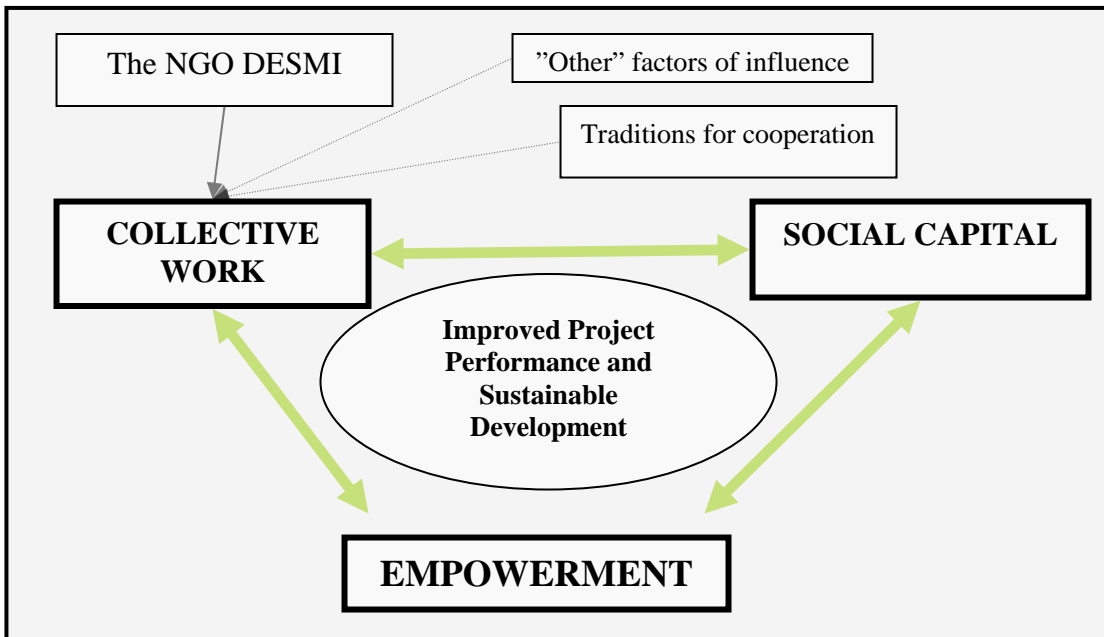
3) *Diversity of ties*

Aldrich and Martinez (2001, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p. 1155) define the diversity of ties with how the different contacts occupy various social positions. The diversity can be seen as the extension of social ties both in geographical and social space. Diversity is considered important for its provision of access to new information and motivation from a variety of sources (Kristiansen, 2004: p. 1155).

#### 4.8. Propositions

Drawn from the prior research and theoretical assumptions presented in this chapter, I have made some propositions about the relations in the research which I will discuss in the analyses of empirical data.

1. Working collectively positively affects the social capital formation
2. Strong social capital and working collectively positively affect individual empowerment processes
3. Empowerment and strong social capital in the villages improve project performance and the sustainability of development projects



**Figure III:** Expectations of the interrelations between the emergence of collective work, the social capital formation, the empowerment processes, and the achievement of sustainable development

## Chapter V:

### Methodology



Methodology is the system of methods used in a particular field, and the methods of social science research refer to manners to collect, analyze and interpret data about the phenomenon of study (Silverman, 2001: p.4). The research objectives guide what methodological approaches are most adequate for the research. This chapter is the methodological guide for the research process and fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted between January and March 2007, but the research process has been facilitated by several pre-visits to the area during the last five years. Prior to my arrival to Chiapas in January 2007, I had established contact with DESMI, and made arrangements with contact persons in the four different villages. Qualitative interviews were held with villagers who are members of collectives, and some who are not, and last but not least, with employees in DESMI.

#### 5.1. Research Methodology

Within research methodology, two main approaches exist referring to the type of data generated from the research process; quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research produces mostly numerical data, while qualitative is more in the form of words and text (Holland and Campbell, 2005: pp.2, Silverman, 2001: pp.4). The methods for data collection also differ within the two approaches. Quantitative research applies non-contextual methods and are designed so to achieve breadth in coverage and driven by deductive methodology. More contextual methods are employed in the qualitative research and they are designed to allow for the consideration of specific localities, cases or social settings, and they employ more inductive methodology (Holland and Campbell, 2005: pp.3). Another major difference between the two research methodologies is that in qualitative in-depth interviewing we recognize and affirm the role of the instrument; the human interviewer. Rather than decrying the fact that the instrument affects the process, one may say that the interviewer can be a very smart, adaptable and flexible instrument who can respond to situations that occur with skills and understanding. Nevertheless, since the researcher is active in the process of knowledge construction and he/she is no longer able to hide behind an 'independent' data set, we are left with a double hermeneutic. This means that the data or knowledge is interpreted by respondents and then re-interpreted by researchers. The researchers are therefore encouraged to recognise their agency and their social distance from those being researched (Giddens, 1974, cited in Holland and Campbell, 2005:p.6),



I have chosen qualitative methodology for this thesis because of the characteristics of being more about words than numbers, and the focus on how people view and understand the world and how they construct meaning out of their experiences (Silverman, 2001:p.4). Qualitative research is about exploratory studies used to identify dimensions of aspects and problems in a society based on in-depth analyses, and therefore suit my topic of investigation. The epistemology of the qualitative methods also insists that we should not invent the viewpoint of the actor, and should only attribute to them ideas about the world they actually hold, in order that we can truly understand their motives, reasons and actions (Holland and Campbell, 2005: p.3).

## **5.2. Qualitative Research Methods**

There are four main methods for data collection in qualitative research: (1) observation, (2) analyzing text and documents, (3) interviews, and (4) recording and transcribing (Silverman, 2001:11). The process of choosing methods for this thesis has been done in light of the different research questions this study seeks to answer. These questions are vital to the planning of the fieldwork, as each of them can help guide me towards the kind of information needed for answering *that* exact question, and thereby what methods are best to retrieve the data to do so (Allan and Somerwell, 2001). I have chosen to focus on two of the methods for qualitative data collection which are participatory *observation* and unstructured and open-ended *interviews* - often as a combination of them both.

The advantages of qualitative methods are that they put few constraints on the answers from the respondents, and the methodology emphasizes details and the uniqueness of every respondent. This openness signify little existence of pre-decision in the research, and often high internal validity for specific situations in the responses, but not easily transferable to others (Jacobsen, 2000:115). The qualitative approaches are flexible in the sense that the point of departure is a research problem, but this research problem can be changes as the researcher learns more, leaving it as an interactive process of investigation (Jacobsen, 2000:115). The advantage of combining interviews and participant observation in this research is among others that the information gathered with the two can supply one another. Another benefit is that when I stay as an observer in the setting before and during the process of conducting interviews, I might unintentionally uncover much interesting data and topics while waiting for the interview to start.

## **5.3. Interviews - Unstructured and Open-ended**

Unstructured and open-ended interviews with individuals are the main research methods applied. *Unstructured* means that fixed questionnaires are not used, but that the interviews rather develop as a kind of conversation between me and the respondent(s) (Jacobsen, 2000: p.46, Kvale, 2001: p.21). Nevertheless, to make sure that all relevant topics are touched at some point in the interview, I have made use of an interview-guide (appendix 1).

*Open-ended* interviews imply that the interviewees can respond freely (Kvale, 2001: p.96). I find this to be the most appropriate, as my object is to get more information about

how people think, and how they value their life situations. It is also an advantage for my thesis topic that the questions are flexible, so that ideas can be followed up or even expanded as I go. The open-ended interviews have the benefit of allowing in-depth investigations, an easier capture of non-verbal clues, and to investigate attitudes among the respondents (Allan and Somerwell, 2001). The somewhat downside of in-depth interviewing is that it takes time, and seldom is one interview with each respondent enough to reach in-depth. As put it by Mishler (1986, cited in Seidman, 1998:p.11); *“Interviewers who propose to explore their topic by arranging a one-shot meeting with an interviewee whom they have never met tread on thin contextual ice”*

### ***5.3.1. Interview Approach: Length, Spacing and Number of Interviews***

To allow for interviewer and respondent to plumb the experience and to place it in context, a method approach of a series of three interviews is proposed by Dolbeare and Schuman (1982, cited in Seidman, 1998:p.11). The first interview establishes the context of the respondents' experience, the second allows for respondent to reconstruct details of their experience within the context, and the third encourages the participant to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. Each of these interviews provides a foundation of details that help illumine the next in line.

I will take advantage of a modified version of Dolbeare and Schuman's approach and make a 'two-step' process for my research, due to time-limitations, and rather use step three for further in-depth investigation with one case study.

*Step one* will be to put the respondent's experience in context by asking him/her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic of interview up to the present time.

*Step two* will be getting to know the details, conduct social network mapping (see point 5.5) and learn about their rate of participation as a part of empowerment processes and about their experience with the capacity building courses. This step will be about getting all the details in place, it will be about their opinions and how they value certain actions, in addition to contain the intellectual and emotional relations between the respondent's work and life.

### ***5.3.2. Sampling and Selection of Informants***

The purpose of sampling is to study a representative subsection of a defined population or group so that inferences can be done about the whole population (Silverman, 2005:p.127). I will apply **purposive snowball sampling** to select my respondents, which is a nonprobability sampling method. Purposive sampling is used when you have a specific plan in mind and seek predefined groups of persons (Columbia University, 2006), which in my case are the participants in the collectives supported by DESMI.

Since my motive is to investigate if and how collective work leads to social capital formation and empowerment for the participants, I need to talk with those participating. The interviews have been held among key informants and a sampled group of participants

in the development projects. The key informants are persons selected for their position or duty assignment in relation to the projects, and are persons who are likely to produce relevant information and in-depth insight about the topic. These key persons have been pointed out to me by DESMI, and I asked them to recommend others whom they know, who also met my criteria. Table I on this page, contains an overview of the respondents chosen through the purposive snowball sampling method.

**Table II: Overview of the Respondents**

<b>Coded name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Collectives supported by DESMI</b>
<b>C 1</b>	Female	37	Store (earlier <i>milpa</i> and vegetable-garden)
<b>C 11</b>	Male	45	Store (earlier <i>milpa</i> and vegetable-garden)
<b>C 12</b>	Male	39	Earlier member
<b>NL 2</b>	Female	26	store, two mills, <i>desgranador</i> , car
<b>NL 3</b>	Female	41	store, two mills, <i>desgranador</i> , car
<b>NL 4</b>	Female	39	store, two mills, <i>desgranador</i> , car
<b>NL 5</b>	Male	59	store, two mills, <i>desgranador</i> , car
<b>NL 6</b>	Female	38	store, two mills, <i>desgranador</i> , car
<b>NZ 7</b>	Female	24	store, <i>milpa</i>
<b>NZ 8</b>	Male	36	store, <i>milpa</i>
<b>NZ 9</b>	Male	42	store, <i>milpa</i>
<b>NZ 10</b>	Male	40	store, <i>milpa</i>
<b>NZ 13</b>	Female	28	Not member
<b>NZ 14</b>	Female	26	Not member
<b>TA 15</b>	Male	35	Store, <i>milpa</i> , car
<b>TA 16</b>	Male	28	Store, <i>milpa</i> , car

*Milpa* = is the local expression for cornfield, implying that also other vegetables are grown together with the corn, like e.g. beans

*Desgranador* = a machine that separate the corn from the core

### 5.3.3. Case Studies

Although the snowball sampling method would hardly lead to representative samples, there are times when it may be the best method available. When case studies are used - as in this research - it is unlikely that these cases will be selected on a random basis (Silverman, 2005: p.127). Important with cases is that they are persons who are interesting in conjunction with my research topic and have the possibility to participate in several rounds of interviews. Such informants cannot be selected randomly.

Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. Procedures for how to conduct good case study research have been proposed by e.g. Yin, who argues that case study research is no sampling research, but that the cases should be selected in a way that maximize what can be learned in the period of time available (Tellis, 1997). Case studies are designed to help bring out a detailed viewpoint of the participants with multiple sources of data, as e.g. interviews and observation. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.

Yin (1994, cited in Tellis, 1997) has presented several applications for using case studies, which are to explain complex causal links in real-life interventions, describe the real-life context where an intervention has occurred, or to describe *the* intervention. Yin further recommend a methodological approach of four stages of case studying; to design, conduct, analyze the evidence, and develop conclusions, recommendations and implications of the study. I have therefore chosen persons who are typical in their own separate way, but also represent some typical features of the whole sample population.

#### **5.3.4. The Interview Setting**

The setting for where interviews take place is important for the outcome. Interviews are best conducted in a place where the interviews feel comfortable, usually in their own homes or in a familiar setting relevant to the topic of the interview (Grenier, 1998). This is particularly important when I am conducting interviews with women in the villages in Chiapas. Their daily-life does not include sitting down and only chat, so from experience I know it can be easier to achieve an in-depth conversation if combining it with helping her out with e.g. various domestic duties, like making food or washing cloths. I also know from my previous stay in Chiapas that the indigenous population in general often is a bit less outgoing and open than Mexicans in general, and that you need to earn their trust to be able to ask in-depth questions or really get them to open up. Open-ended questions will not have the same effect if the respondents don't feel safe answering them. It is therefore utterly important to be alert to what setting interviews are held in. If interviews are conducted in a setting removed from the topic, some informants may have difficulty remembering, describing, or discussing the subject in detail (Johnson 1992, cited in Grenier, 1998).

#### **5.4. Participant Observation**

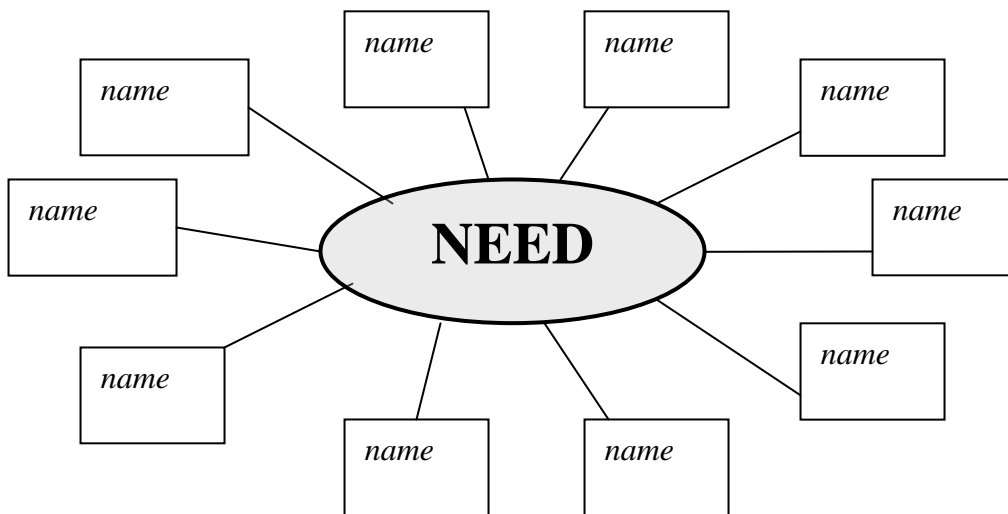
Participant observation is a set of research strategies which aim to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. It is a period of social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the latter's environment (Allan and Sommerwell, 2001). A strength of observation and interaction over long periods of time is that researchers can discover discrepancies between what participants say (and often believe) should happen and what actually does happen (Allan and Sommerwell, 2001). Participant observation has advantages for my research as it allows a way of looking at the situation or behavior of people so as to compare it with what people report. I have chosen to include this method because of the special insight to a community's values,

internal relationships, structures and conflicts that I as a participant observer can derive from their observed actions, rather than from their normative statements of what things are (Silverman, 2001: p.13).

### 5.5. Social Network Mapping

The qualitative in-depth interviews are particularly appropriate in the search of information about social capital through the method of 'network mapping'. I have conducted the social network mapping in the second interviews. This mapping has made possible an analysis of the relationships and trust between people, groups and organizations. The analysis is used to determine the social capital (as networks) of individual actors, displayed in a social network diagram with nodes and ties. The nodes in the network are the people and groups, while the lines show relationships or flows between the nodes. Such network mapping will provide a visual analysis of peoples' networks, which again can be used for further analyses of their significance, in relation to social capital formation. The shape of the social network helps determine a network's usefulness to its individuals in various situations.

**Figure IV: Example of social network map**



### 5.6. Possible Research Problems

When conducting research in other countries and cultures than your own, it is very easy to bump into socio-cultural and courtesy-bias errors (Grenier, 1998). The socio-cultural errors can be e.g. that the respondent finds my research questions unfamiliar in format, uncomfortable or embarrassing, or just culturally inappropriate. I can attempt to counteract the socio-cultural errors by thorough preparations, but unfortunately the courtesy-bias errors are more difficult to escape. They arise when respondents feel compelled to express only views they think I as an interviewer want to hear, and unfortunately these problems are somewhat difficult to uncover (Grenier, 1998).

### **5.6.1. A Foreigner in the Research Setting**

As a result of the increasing use of cross cultural research the last decades, the methodological difficulties of transporting experimental data across cultures have received attention (Ryen 2002b, pp.335). Communication is to attach meaning to the things we see and hear, but the meaning we attach is influenced by our different cultural background. Cultural knowledge can be defined as '*the knowledge people use to generate and interpret human behavior*' (Spradley and McCurdy, 1972, cited in Ryen, 2002a: p. 221), and the knowledge is coded as a complex system of symbols, and serves as a filter when we decode the information we see or hear. This is relevant when conducting interviews in Chiapas, as my respondents and I might have different conceptions of the symbols used during the interview process. This can cause misunderstandings from my side, or from the respondents, and can ultimately influence the research results.

Unstructured and open-ended interview can, according to Ryen (2002a: p.221-222), be tools to overcome some of the problems of cross-cultural interpretation, as they are flexible enough to notice the cultural differences or how they affect the outcome of the interviews.

Participant observation method over a longer period of time has been appropriate for this research because of the tense political situation in Chiapas. I have enjoyed confidence and trust with the villages due to my earlier work in this region, but still I have had to keep in mind that there is always the risk of people acting differently around me as foreigner (Silverman, 2001:p.58). There are some steps that I have done to attempt to minimize such affects, e.g. be aware of how I dress and act. Nevertheless, this will never be enough to really escape my role as 'a foreigner'.

### **5.6.2. Gender Sensitivity**

Women and men are socialized differently and they often function in different spheres of the community. Therefore they of course also know different things and possess different knowledge about similar things (Simpson 1994, cited in Grenier, 1998). I have therefore found it important to have a gender-sensitive focus on the research process. My research questions depend on information from various actors in the society, and access to the opinions and views of women is highly important. Accomplishing this is not always easy. Women generally have many roles in rural Chiapas, and a research activity may interfere with their overload of daily routines. To ensure that women can participate, I will have to make consultations to find out when, where, and how to schedule research activities in accordance with their days.

## **5.7. The Interpretation of Qualitative Data**

According to Dey (1993, cited in Goodwin, 2006: p. 43), all qualitative data have to undergo three stages of analyses; be (1) described, (2) classified, and (3) connected. The description is the pure portrayal of data, which for interviews can be the transcripts or the research diary in observation. The next stage involves breaking up the data, move it around, make categories, and place together information from various individual

interviews. The third stage entails more than just identify similarities, but also analyze the interrelations of data and put them into a larger structure.

Measuring non-tangible resources like e.g. social capital has an intrinsic appeal. It is crucial to keep in mind *whose capital* is at issue; is the research about the social capital's influence on individual successes or about the contributions to societal outcomes? (Inkeles, 2001:p.23). Another question is what measures should be used. Some kind of social capital can have impact on outcomes quite different from the seemingly obvious connections one are looking for (Inkeles, 2001:p. 24). The ability to establish the true direction of the influence of social capital is limited, and I must therefore be careful to assume that a correlation establishes a genuine causal connection. There might easily be other forces of influence that aren't immediately visible.

To facilitate a measurement of the non-tangible resources in this study I have operationalized the two most important concepts; social capital and empowerment, in section 4.7 in Chapter IV.

## **5.8. Validity and Reliability**

Reliability has to do with the quality of measurement, and can in the field method of observation be improved with better systematization of data. Spradley (1979, cited in Silverman, 2001: p.227) suggests to do this by making short notes during the observation, and expand the notes as soon as possible after each field session. He also proposes holding a fieldwork journal as a running record of analyses and interpretations. In regards to qualitative interviews, the reliability can be improved by pre-testing the interview-guide, and record of all face-to face interviews (Kvale, 2001:p.102).

Validity has to do with the trustworthiness of the data and that the researcher is actually measuring what he/she is supposed to measure (Kvale, 2001: p. 105). In qualitative research can it e.g. be a challenge to evaluate the trustworthiness of e.g. a transcribed interview. Transcribing imply to translate from oral language – with its' own rules – to the written language with totally other rules.

## **5.9. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality refers to the data and to limiting the access for outsiders to private data about a person, and anonymity means that names and unique identifiers of subjects are never attached to the data (UMSL, 2006).

After the Zapatista uprising in 1994 there has been severe tensions between indigenous who support the Zapatistas and Para-military groups that have emerged in the state. The fear that many villages have lived under has made them more suspicious towards strangers. I find it to be my ethical responsibility to maintain anonymous all the private information entrusted to me by the respondents. Without such assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, potential interviewees may be unwilling to give honest answers about themselves or participate in the interviews at all in fear for sanctions.

Procedures that I will carry out to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality in my research are i.e. to remove the subject names as soon as the data are transcribed or use codenames/alias on the research subjects if they want me to do so. The identifying list will be stored separately from the collected data.



## Chapter VI:

### Collective Work Organization in Chiapas



The society we live in is built with collective actions and strategic cooperation to accomplish goals of developing the way we have. Houses are seldom built by one man alone, and every child sees the light of day due to the strategic cooperation between two people. Nevertheless, in today's society, individualism is spreading around the globe encouraging a focus on the needs and values of an autonomous and unique self (individual) over those of the group (collective). In this section I will look at the specific features of the four collectives of investigation and the motivation behind organizing collectively in rural Chiapas. Introducing this chapter is a portrayal of the collectives within theories of cooperatives and collective actions and reasons for the emergence of collective actions in Chiapas.

When referring to 'collectives' in the discussion, I have employed ICA's definition, which means they associations with voluntary membership and they are established to meet common needs through collectively owned and run business or production (Fairbaum, 2004: p.24, cited in Merrett and Walzer, 2004).

#### 6.1. The Emergence of Collective Actions

The four collectives investigated in this study have all emerged to address the problems of marginalization and poverty they experience as indigenous and *campesinos* in rural Mexico. Their collective actions are directed at projects for survival and the improvement of production methods, like e.g. the electronic mills and *desgranador*, so to diminish the economic problems they face every day. This follows the historic trend of collective formation among rural poor highlighted by Sandler (2004: p.17), Svendsen and Svendsen (2004: p.4), Merrett and Walzer (2004: p.xii) and Reardon and Barrett (2000, cited in Kristiansen, 2006: p.19). The work accomplished by the groups of between 6 and 29 families in NL, NZ and TA are clear examples of collective actions following the group rationality of the Prisoner's Dilemma (Gillison, 2004:p.9), where their forces are united with the goal to achieve more than what the individuals managed on their own. These collective actions match the ICA's recognized cooperative structure (Fairbaum (2004: p.24, cited in Merret and Walzer, 2004), however, I will refer to them as collectives than cooperatives in this study, as that is the characteristic they use of themselves. The collectives are owned by all members in common by that all member families pay an

economic contribution as start-up, so that the group as a whole can contribute their approx. 10 % when asking loans from DESMI. The collectives are also controlled by the members through regular meetings and democratic decision-making, and the benefits drawn from the work are generally used for common purposes.

#### ***6.1.1. Political Motivation for Collective Works***

The collectives investigated inhabit fairly similar attributes, strategies and goals, which are embedded in the emergence within the same geographical and cultural context, and within the same time period (Fairbaum, 2004: p. 24, cited in Merret and Walzer, 2004). The collectives are started with the financial support of DESMI and their successes today are to a certain extent facilitated by DESMI. However, I will argue that the existence of these collectives is far from dependent on the NGO's work. All member-respondents (part of a collective) expressed ideas and motivation to work collectively which had emerged in the communities before contacting DESMI, and these ideas were often related to their commitment to the Zapatista Movement. This pre-existence of the collective motivation is also confirmed by DESMI's work practices, where the communities have to apply to them with an already clear idea of how and why they want to work as a collective.

Membership and belief in the Zapatista movement stands out as a persuasive factor to engage in collective work in rural Chiapas, and therefore constitute one of the *other factors of influence* from the figure at page 37. The collective identity appeared very strong in NL, NZ and TA, but always closely connected with the Zapatista identity and ideology. Many respondents nearly juxtapose their cooperation with DESMI with their work with the Zapatista movement.

From my acquaintance with the Movement, I believe that the high number of Zapatista loan applications in DESMI's inbox stems from the fact that the Movement is based upon an ideology of solidarity, and that cooperation and the betterment of communities as a whole is highlighted at all meetings and communiqués. The Movement have united large parts of Mexico's indigenous in a fight for more influence and recognition in the Mexican society, illustrating an emerging collective trend noticed by Merrett and Walzer (2004: p.xii) among the poor in the present day capitalist society. From always being ignored in the Mexican society, the indigenous have obtained a voice through uniting their forces in this movement, symbolizing that collectively they may go further.

#### ***6.1.2. Traditions for Collective Work***

In NL and TA, *traditions for collective work* – not rooted in any political movement – have also been decisive factors for the existence of the collectives. In NL, the Zapatista families wanted to open their own collective as they had good experiences from the earlier collective work and with them the desire to continue the same path. In TA, working the land collectively has been the norm since the end of the 1940s, which implies that the inhabitants have the traditions for why and how to work collectively.

## 6.2. Nueva Zaqualpa – A Mixed Community

NZ is a new and ethnically mixed community, and the idea of organizing their work collectively started with the Tzotzil families few years after they settled down in the new village. The respondents expressed that they wanted to establish a fellowship that enabled them to stay together in the fight for their new future at their new settlement. Since they came poor from Huixtan in the Highlands, there were financial difficulties at the start of the collectives. Through contacts in the Zapatista movement from surrounding villages the Tzotzil families contacted DESMI in 1996, and managed to obtain a loan to rent land for a collective *milpa*.

*“(...) unfortunately, we failed the first year with the collective milpa. That year was almost free of rain, which was devastating for the corn production. So after paying back DESMI we had more or less nothing left. So we had to borrow again.”* (NZ10, man, 40)

The failures didn't kill the organizing spirit in NZ and after a couple of years, the profit after paying back DESMI was enough to at last *buy* themselves a piece of land (10 hectares). This land is still in use as a collective *milpa* where all the six families work together; women, men and children.

*“(...) this land we today cultivate 100% naturally. We don't add anything, neither chemicals nor organic fertilizers. But when we learn more about organic farming and how to make the organic compost and fertilizers, we hope to use this to improve the production in this field (...)”* (NZ10, man, 40)

In the year 2000 they obtained loan from DESMI to start up a collective store. The store is run by one family who has volunteered to use part of their house as location, but all the six families help out to buy new groceries from the town Villa las Rosas when necessary. They also have a collectively owned car, but they have bought that for own money earned from the collectives.

The harvest and income from the collective *milpa* is never divided between the families but used for collective purposes. Some of the corn is used for pig food, as the autonomous school has pigs that the children care for as a project to raise piglets for sale. They also take from the harvest when participating with their share of beans and corn to the volunteer health workers at the autonomous clinic in NL. What is left they sell and use the money for common purposes like e.g. gasoline for the car, sending people to DESMI courses outside the village or to Zapatista meetings in the caracol Oventic.

*“(...) this year we have also withheld a part of our corn and beans from the collective milpa which we are going to give to a young woman in a neighbor village who recently lost her husband. From the Zapatista organization we learn that we must always care for each other, that we are all a collective of farmers who must help when someone is in need. So, all the organized families in this area are going to send her part of their production to help her get about (...)”* (NZ7, woman, 24)

### 6.3. Nueva Libertad – Exclusion and Division

The whole community in NL was once a large collective, which had obtained credit from the organization CIOAC (Independent Centre for Agricultural Workers and Farmers) to buy a collective car, a mill (for the tortilla dough), a *desgranador* and to open a store. When the Zapatista movement was emerging in the end of 1993, CIOAC denied supporting Zapatistas, so those who chose to organize were excluded from the collective.

The Zapatista families decided from day one that they wanted to continue working collectively, but needed financial help to start up their own collectives. Through friends in the city Comitan they were informed about DESMI and soon after they handed in their first loan-application. By the end of 1994 they had bought a mill for the tortilla dough and a *desgranador* for their harvest. The next year they obtained an extra loan to amplify their store (which they had managed to open with own means during the first week of exclusion), and to buy a car. By the beginning of 1996, the new collective had access to the same services as they had had before the breakup; car, mill for tortilla dough, mill for pig food, *desgranador* and store. Today the collective has 29 member families in NL.

The store is attended by shared turns with six families in charge every month. Two and two women work together 10 days of the month, and their men help organizing the trips to neighboring towns to buy merchandises. The two mills and the *desgranador* are also worked in shifts. The mill for tortilla dough is operated by one family pr day, the mill for pig food is operated by one family every Saturday, and the *desgranador* by all the men once a year. The men operate the mills and the women collect the fee from the users and clean the mill after use.

*“(...) Every morning I use the collective mill to grind the corn for tortillas. We have to be there everyone at the same time (05:30 a.m.) because there is always one man who is there to operate the mill for us. The men in the collective share turns on one month each doing that work. I have to pay every day to get the corn grinded, but since we are not so many men in our family it is not more than about 1 peso every day. The man who operates the mill doesn’t receive the money. Every day there is a woman there who takes the money. All the women in the collective share that work, and take one day each (...)” (NL2, Woman, 26)*

The collective car is operated by a group of men who have the confidence of the collective. There are no buses going to or from NL, so the collective car is used as public transportation for the Zapatista families going to nearby cities every Saturday and Monday. The car is also used by all families to transport their harvest of corn from the *milpa* to their house once a year. Sometimes the car is used to bring firewood and for transportation when there are courses held outside the village.

*“(...) “All of the families participate in the collectives, both women and men. And it is important that we work together to share experiences and take advantages of our different skills as men and women “(...) (NL4, Woman, 39)*

The collectives in NL are organized with a system where all pay a small fee every time they use a service; but a very reasonable prize that everyone can afford. The only service

they don't pay anything for is the use of the car. Depending on the amount of corn, they pay between 10-40 pesos every time they grind pig food, for the tortilla mill the cost is between 1-3 pesos pr day, and the *desgranador* (only used once pr year) can be between 200-400 pesos depending on the size of their *milpa*. The money collected from this work is never divided between the families, but saved for common purposes.

*"(...) we don't gain any money directly from our collectives. The first years we had to pay back the loans to DESMI, and now we save the money for common purposes. E.g. gasoline for our car, or if someone has to leave the village for a Zapatista meeting we can help out as a community with the finances for the trip (...)" (NL5, man, 59)*

The surplus from the store is used for multiple purposes; to buy new groceries, amplify the selection of products if necessary, and the rest is saved and used for common purposes together with the income from the other collective activities. These purposes can be the maintenance of the machinery of the mills and *desgranador*, or reparations and gasoline for car. They also use from the collective fund when paying the voluntary teacher at the autonomous school, when they help out with food to the autonomous health clinic, to send members to Zapatista meetings or to DESMI courses held outside the village.

#### **6.4. Canjobito- Unity Collapsed**

The emerging collective in CA got contact with DESMI through their Zapatista companions in NL. Just after, the ten Zapatista families in the village turned in their own application for a start-up loan. In 1996, they established a collective store for the women and a collective *milpa* for the men to work together. Unfortunately, after the second year the unity of the collective *milpa* collapsed. The collective store remained but is today run by only two – of the original ten- families.

*" (...) I think the milpa collective failed so quickly because they were expecting more financial outcome from the work than what they got. Many families only focused on the economic part. The collective store on the other hand lasted for a while. We were 10 families when we started up. It was so nice. The women were working in the store, and the men in the milpa. But one after one the families started retiring from both (...)" (C1, woman, 37)*

The collective *milpa* was worked together by all ten men (and sons) whenever it was time to sow, clean the weed, add fertilizers or harvest. The store was run by the ten women, which shifted turns, one week of work each. The first year they had to use the surplus from the store to pay back the loan to DESMI. From the second year of they used what they earned from the sale to fill up the store and slowly expand the selection every time possible. The *milpa* never lasted long enough to give much economic surplus. The first year they started paying back the loan to DESMI and the small surplus left was split between the member families. The same redistribution was repeated the second year, and shortly after some families started leaving the collective. The store collective also shrunk

as the years went by as more and more women lost the desire to work for collective purposes and no salaries.

*(...) When we were more families we took turns of one week of selling each. When the families were fewer and fewer it became more work on the few of us left. The last year we had a month each on the two families left. The work is so much harder now and not so much fun (...)" (C1, woman, 37)*

## **6.5. Tres Amores- Collective Land Ownership**

TA is run as an *ejido* and has a long collective history in terms of ownership of the land. In the mid-90s the collective of 20 families expanded their work with a store and a car with the financial assistance from DESMI. Shortly after, they intensified the work in the *milpa* collective with a loan to the purchase of new seeds and better tools. The *milpa* is worked by all the men in partnership and the store is operated by the women, even though the men also help out buying groceries for the store.

*(...) "When we work together the work is happier and we can achieve more. Like when we had large problems with stones in our collective field we decided one day that we were going to clean it, and we did. We went together about 30 men and boys and lifted away all the rocks we could manage, and the largest stones we used our donkeys and the collective car to drag out of the field. Now we get more out of our land than what we did before. And more vegetables have appeared in the field because of better growth conditions (...)" (TA16, man, 28)*

The men have weekly meetings to decide what work must be done in the *milpa*. The women are also invited to these meetings, but they are mainly responsible for the operation of the store. The shifts at the store are worked by two women per week, and all twenty families have to be present to do the monthly accounting.

The collective car is used for all transportation needed for the production in the *milpa*, and for buying groceries for the store in Villa las Rosas. They also use the collective car to transport people to courses outside the village and to Zapatista meetings if there is money for gasoline. When the car is used to buy groceries for the store they often combine it with offer transportation for individual shopping in Villa las Rosas for the villagers. They then charge everyone with 2 pesos each for the transportation.

The money they earn from the store is used for buying new groceries, and the surplus is saved for collective purposes together with the earnings for shopping-tours to Villa las Rosas. Ninety percent of the income from the *milpa* is divided between the families, and ten percent is held back for the collective savings. The collective money is used for gasoline for the collective car, helping out with their share to the autonomous health clinic in NL, and the rest is used for traveling to courses in other villages and to Zapatista meetings in the caracol Oventic.

## Chapter VII:

### Results and Discussion



This thesis deals with concepts and theories of alternative development, empowerment and social capital and their application to the context of collective work for social and economic development in rural Chiapas. In the following chapter, the empirical data and social network mapping results will be discussed in relation to the introduced theories of social capital and empowerment, and in relation to the stated research objectives and three interrelated prepositions of this thesis;

*(1) Working collectively positively affects the social capital formation*



*(2) Strong social capital and working collectively positively affect individual empowerment processes*



*(3) Empowerment and strong social capital in the villages improves project performance and the sustainability of development projects*

## PROPOSITION ONE – Collective work and Social Capital

- Collective work has a positive effect on social capital formation –

The social network mapping was conducted with the objective of surveying the respondents' social capital as “*norms and networks, and the resources that they can access*” (Edwards, 2004: p.305). The classification of the data is based on three characteristics: the number, strength and diversity of the social ties. I will look at these features separately and interwoven to see if and how the formation of networks and norms of trust are affected by the collective organization of work.

### 7.1. The Number of Ties

When analyzing the results from the social network mapping, I have found the actual number of relations to be a useful approach because they, as argued by Biussevain (1974, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p. 1154), represent one of the most important network properties. In figure V (page 55) I have included the average number of ties per need per village, and divided the respondents between *members in collectives* and *non-members in collectives*. This figurative display shows a positive relation between participation in collectives and high average number of ties in TA, NZ and CA.

**Table III: Number and strength of ties by village and collective participation**

VILLAGE	Average number of ties per need	Average number of strong ties per need
<b>CA</b>		
Member	5.3	4.0
Non-member	3.0	2.0
<b>NL</b>		
Member	6.5	4.2
Non-member	-	-
<b>TA</b>		
Member	5.0	4.3
Non-member	3.5	2.0
<b>NZ</b>		



Member	5.6	4.6
Non-member	3.0	3.0

The village with the highest average number of ties included per need is NL. The reason for this may be seen in relation to two separate issues; (1) the village has more inhabitants and the collective has more members than the other villages, (2) the collective in NL has good and regular communication between all the members and a work structure that seems to create friendship and trust among the members.

**Table IV: Numerical overview of the social network mapping of *members* in collectives:**

<b>NEED</b>	<b>No. of respondents mentioning this need</b>	<b><u>Number:</u> average no. of relations</b>	<b><u>Strength:</u> average no. of 'thick' relations</b>	<b><u>Variety:</u> average no. of relations within the collective</b>
Need for money or transportation in relation to sickness in the closest family	8	8.8	4.6	5.0
Need for someone to look after your children and give them food because you are away for a course	6	4.3	3.3	3.5
Need for someone to work in the collective store because you are away for a course	4	8.0	5.5	8.0
Need for someone to work the <i>milpa</i> for you because of sickness, or not being there of other reasons	3	5.3	4.2	4.3

Need for someone to help you cure your chickens or buy new when they die	2	8.5	5.5	6.0
Need for someone to lend you money to buy work tools	2	3.5	0.5	1.0
Need for someone to help you repair something in the house	2	5.5	3.5	5.5
Need for someone to travel to the city to call you in sick for your duties in the clinic	1	7	4	6
Need for someone to attend a Zapatista meeting for you because you can't leave the children (single mom)	1	3	2	3
Need for someone to help you make tortillas and wash clothes because you have a bad shoulder	1	5	3	5

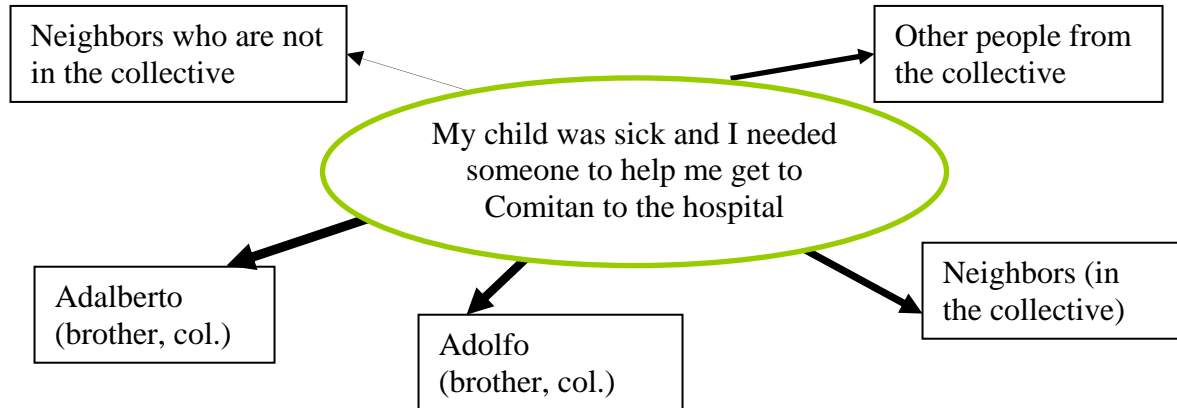
## 7.2. The Strength of Ties

The strength of ties can be measured by the duration or frequency of a relationship, and during the interviews we categorized strong or “thick” ties as relations to people they meet almost everyday, work with, live close to, and trust.

From table III, the calculations show that compared to the general average of ties per need, both the non-members and members have more strong ties than weak ties. Although on average, the member respondents from all villages have more strong ties per need than non-members. The network maps generally expose numbers, but with all respondents, the conversation about the networks *after* making them, revealed how trust was decisive to the strength of tie they drew. This confirms the interrelation between strong ties and social capital formation in form of trust advocated by Johannisson (1996, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p. 1154) – trust gives strong ties, and strong ties forms trust.

Table III exposes that all the relations mentioned to other collective members (family and not-family) are perceived as strong ties, and I will therefore look into some of the prospects for trust-building in the collective work.

**Figure V: Example of social network map drawn by NL 4, woman 39**



### 7.2.1. Trust and Success

The member respondents emphasized that in the collectives they need to trust each other in that everyone does their share when expected to and have confidence in the other's honesty in e.g. the handling of money in the store. As Putnam (2002: p.5) maintains, social capital is the core of people's ability to cooperate. Respondents from NL, NZ and TA emphasized how common goals, good communication and trust in each other are important aspects for the success of their collectives. In CA this was never thoroughly established before starting up the work, which lead to failure, and hereby proving Argoth et al (1993, cited in Røkholt, 2000: p.13) right in that lasting collaboration depends on the level of commitment to collective goals. The next quote illustrates how there were disagreements about the objective of the collective work in CA:

*(...) "The difficulties here were that the people didn't understand the benefits of the work, or lost their will to fight. Because working together is a fight in the way that you have to communicate and get to agreements of how to work" (...) (C1, woman, 37)*

### 7.2.2. The Strength in Small Group Face to Face Interaction

Trust, as 'thick' social capital, is built through close and continuous interaction between people (Putnam, 2002: p.10, Fox, 1997: p.120), and I have found that the collectives investigated are good foundations for trust-building. This is particularly in their regular meetings with all members, and the emphasis they put on communication to solve problems that arise in organizing the work.

Rural villages in Chiapas are generally quite small in terms of inhabitants, which make the collectives within these villages small as well. The regular contact and cooperation between the small amount of members can be defined as what Svendsen and Svendsen

(2004: p.28) call 'small group face-to-face interaction'. They argue that this type of contact has the benefit of strengthening social capital as trust by the creation of common ideas and norms. The social network mapping from all four villages illustrates this accumulation of trust as strong ties from member to member.

The network mapping from NL further reveals that the even smaller sub-groups within the collectives - like e.g. those you share store duty with - are the families within the collective whom they trusted the most in terms of asking for help. The respondents from TA also expressed similar confirmations of the social capital formation in the very smallest collective actions, as their spouses more often asked the family with whom they shared shift in the store for help, particularly when there were questions about borrowing things or to look after the children. The following quote, and the case study of NL2 on the next page, illustrate that the more face-to-face interaction, the more trust seemed to be established among the members.

*(...) "We ask each other because we know each other better, and we always get together and collaborate on the collective machinery or the store, so I trust them to help me, and they know that I will help them. If I am not behaving well with them it will not be nice working together" (...) (NL4, woman, 39)*

### **7.2.3. Smaller Needs and Stronger Ties**

From the social network mapping I can sum up that the general norm with the member-respondents seems to be (1) first ask for help among family who are Zapatistas and in the collective, (2) secondly to ask neighbors who are within the same two categories, and (3) thirdly to ask family outside the collective.

The portrayal of the social network mapping results in Figure III shows that the 'smaller needs' - more connected to human capital than physical capital like money-, often contain fewer ties. However they are almost exclusively strong ties. I will argue that the strong ties, built through the regular interaction and cooperation in the collectives, make people feel safe with each other, and less embarrassed to ask for help in 'small needs'. The respondents expressed that they included few ties because they had so much trust in positive response from the few they had drawn in the maps that they didn't find it necessary adding more.

The 'larger needs' - like e.g. *need for financial or logistical help in relation to sickness in the family* - score high on average number of ties in Figure III. All the respondents who mentioned these needs argued that they included many ties due to the 'crisis'-element. Both respondents from NZ and NL bring up the possibility to borrow from villagers who are not part of the collective, though they also explain these ties to be very weak as they didn't feel certain that they would receive help at all, and that if they did, these would be loans with high interests and very limited time to pay back. Nevertheless, they expected it to be easier to ask people they normally didn't trust to receive help from because of the emergency.

## **TAKING CARE OF EACH OTHER IN THE COLLECTIVE**

### **Case Study of NL2:**

At the cake baking course in Tres Lagunas, one woman stands out as the most eager of them all. “Silvia” participates in her second course with DESMI about how to bake different cakes and cookies, and how to use the large brick-ovens heated with firewood.

*“I have been lucky to participate in a cake-baking course, and I hope one day that we can start a cake-sale with the women here” (Silvia 26)*

Silvia is 26 years old, and has two young daughters. They live with their parents-in-law in NL, but her husband is in the US, seeking illegal work. Her father-in-law is sick, and her mother-in-law uses all her time caring for him. Silvia’s own family is from a village some hours from her new home.

To be a single mum, when your own closest family lives far away, could easily hampered Silvia’s opportunities to participate in courses and meetings. She is more or less “tied” to the house, doing all domestic and income-generating work, and taking care of the children by herself. Luckily for Silvia, she has people to ask for help in the neighborhood. People that she trust, and who understand her. In NL, she is part of a six-family-shift in the collective store, and with the five other women she has established strong ties. When it is Silvia’s turn to participate in something that requires her to leave the villages for a day or more, the other women step in and take care of her children and domestic animals. And she does the same for them.

*“Sometimes life here can be very hard, but the fellowship with the others keeps us happy, and keeps us with faith in our work and the resistance. I think that working in collective is something that can help us move forward. It is very sad that so many boys and men leave to work in the USA. Maybe if we could improve our work with learning more in the collectives, fewer people would leave” (Silvia, 26)*

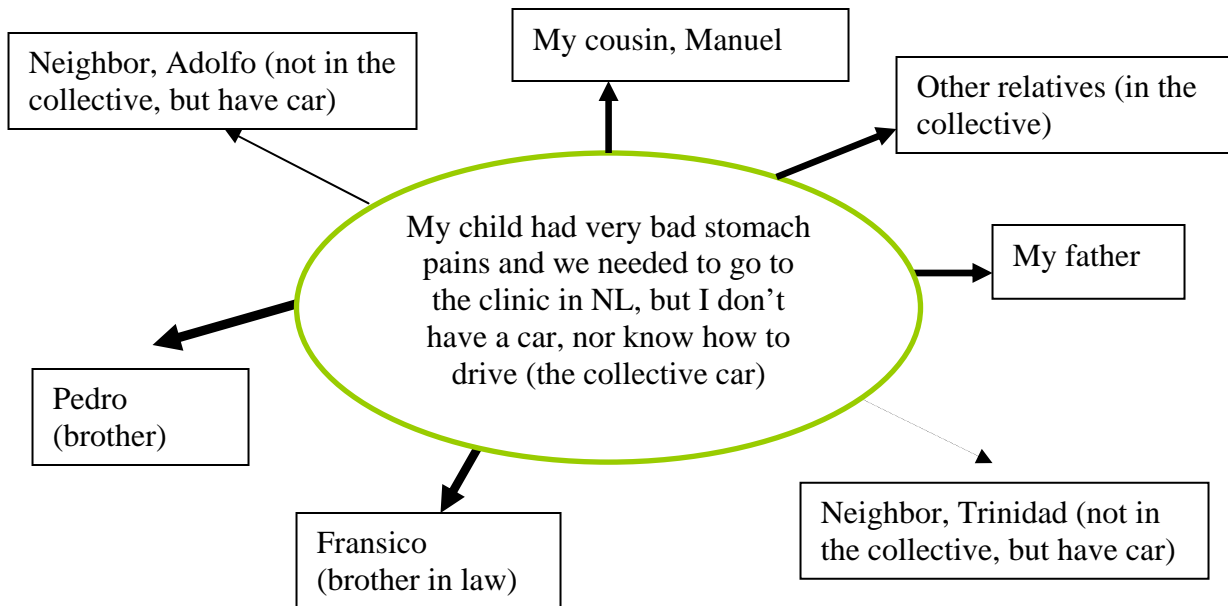
### **7.2.4. Family Relations, Collectives and Zapatista Belonging**

In general, all respondents drew most strong ties to family members. Since there is little mobility in the rural villages most families live together all through life. This increases the duration of the relationships, and most likely also the frequency, opening the possibilities to make the social ties to family very strong. Nevertheless, the empirical evidences show that family relation isn’t the only decisive factor as the ties are further strengthened by being together in the collective work and in the resistance movement as Zapatistas. In the conversations about the networks it turned out that almost all family members mentioned are within the collective.

In NL three respondents expressed that family members who had recently left the Zapatista Movement and the collective, they could still ask them without feeling that they had to reciprocate the help immediately. Respondents from all the villages stated that if help was not available within the village collective, they would in most cases ask Zapatistas from surrounding villages before asking the people outside the collectives and the Zapatista movement. This confirms both the work collective and the larger Zapatista collective as sources of social capital formation, as common norms and collectively negotiated networks (Edwards, 2004:p.305)

The collective NZ is the smallest in terms of members, and the network maps reveal that the respondents mentioned almost every member family as possible source of help in all of the networks. Additionally they draw them as strong ties. Compared to the other villages, the social network mapping from NZ reveals the highest average number of strong ties. This collective has the most frequent whole-group meetings, but as a small collective these are also small-group interactions forming social capital. It should also be noted that NZ is a relatively new village, and all the six families participating in the collective are closely related to each other by blood, and cultural heritage. They are struggling to preserve their Tzotzil identity in a Tzeltal area. This seems to tie them further together, and to establish strong ties, recognized by trust and confidence, among the members. This confirms Fox's (1997: p.120) arguments of how the strong ties are likely to develop from family relation or from below.

**Figure VI: Example of social network map, drawn by NZ 9, man 42**



#### ***7.2.5. Reciprocity Formed by Collective Work and Immobility***

The issue of reciprocity is connected to an inter-agreement of the importance of showing goodwill, and helping your fellowman (Putnam, 2002:p.7). Respondents from all four

villages emphasized that both (1) as part of a collective we must help each other, and (2) as Zapatistas we must help each other. The reciprocity of this help I find strengthened by the immobility in the rural areas of Chiapas. Except for young women when marrying, and young men when leaving the country to work as illegal immigrants, there is more or less no-one who moves from their village. The social control within the villages, and the collectives, makes it difficult to outrun one's responsibility to reciprocate help somewhere down the road. If you don't behave well towards your fellowman, people will remember. The collectives' systems of close and regular interaction have therefore created very strong ties between the members, urging them to help each other when needed, and without asking for immediate repayment.

Closely interwoven into the concept of reciprocity is the quality of trustworthiness. As members of a collective, small or large, they would value or judge whether the other members are trustworthy their help and support without demanding immediate return; – reciprocity. From the empirical data I will claim that the collective activities and identity, both as a larger Zapatista collective and as small work collectives in the village, have positively affected social capital of reciprocity. This is e.g. shown by how the Zapatista families in the zone where the four villages of investigation is located, help each other when needed, and within the collectives, as illustrated by these two quotes:

(...) *"The good thing about collective is that we get to know everyone in the village, and we help each other when we can. If one family has problems the others must always help. We don't have much money but we have large hearts"*  
(...) (TA16, man, 28).

(...) *"This year we have withheld a part of the corn and beans from the collective milpa, which we are going to give to a young woman in a neighbor village who recently lost her husband. From the Zapatista organization we learn that we must always care for each other, that we are all a collective of farmers who must help when someone is in need. So, all the organized families in this area are going to send her part of their production to help her get about"* (...) (NZ9, man, 42)



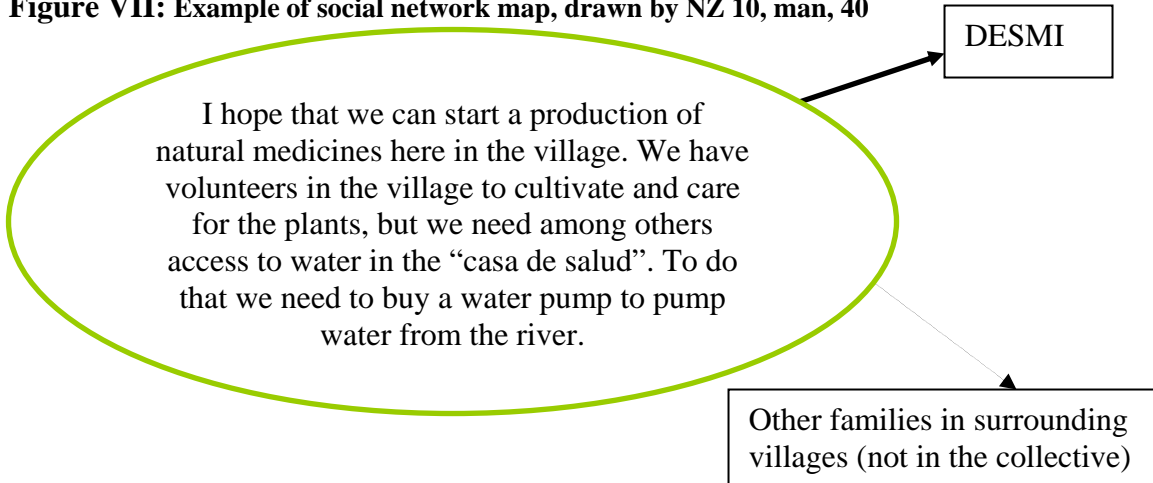
Photo XI: the bags of corn that were donated to the widower

### 7.3. Diversity in the Relations

While the social network mapping shows high numbers of ties in general, and of the strong ties, it also reveals a restricted geographical diversity in the networks. Few of the respondents mention any 'source of help' from outside the village, and everyone has their family who are also Zapatistas and part of the collective as their first choices to ask. Also the non-member respondents have their closest family members as first (and sometimes

only) choices to ask. Except for the networks drawn around the *need for financial assistance* when disease hit your family members or to buy better work tools and *need for knowledge of how to cure the domestic animals*, the only sources of help mentioned are within the village or from people from neighboring villages who are more or less in the same life situation.

**Figure VII: Example of social network map, drawn by NZ 10, man, 40**



At the need for money because of illness, as many as an average of 3.8 of 8.8 relations connects to someone outside the collectives. As the high number of ties mentioned to this need is related to the crisis-element, so is the high number of outside and weak ties. Within the villages the financial situation for the inhabitants is very similar, which means that they in need for extra money will seek loans from richer family members who live in nearby cities. Though as expressed in the following quote, that might not always be the best way to go:

(...) “When it comes to borrowing some crisis money, I might ask other families I know that might have money. But if lending from richer families the interest is at least 15 % which sometimes we can’t afford” (...) (NL 5, man, 59)

I find the general lack of diversity for both members and non-members traced to the immobility in the rural areas of Chiapas. Whether those who e.g. cross the country and national borders as work immigrants will return with wider and more diverse network, is still to be discovered. Either way, as the next quote shows, those living in the rural villages have their connections and ties to people whom they know well from growing up together, work together, and from being in more or less the same life situations.

(...) “I ask for help mostly within the collective since we know each other best because we meet all the time. Those are the people I talk most to, our wives work together; our children go to the same school” (...) (NZ10, man, 40)



### 7.3.1. Diversity in Social Space

According to Aldrich and Martinez (2001, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p.1155) the diversity of ties also treats the various social positions your network relations have. Apart from for the men chosen as *responsables* in their villages, I didn't get the impression of any clear social hierarchy within the collectives or within the villages in general. The diversity as extension of ties in social space is therefore also very poor.

The lack of diversity is negative in the sense that the it may harm the provision of new knowledge and ideas (Kristiansen, 2004: p.1155), though on the positive side I will maintain that it might imply strengthening of reciprocity because of social control in the villages and the difficulties to outrun one's responsibility to reciprocate help. Even though this is not displayed in the networks as a social tie, the member respondents have good access to new information and motivation through their contact with both DESMI and the Zapatista Movement. From the conversation about the social network mapping I also learnt that they do ask these instances for help, both with courses and loans, but always as collectives, never as individuals.



Photo(s) XII: from one of the Zapatista headquarters

## 7.4. Summing up Proposition One

Based on past the discussion of the social network mapping results, I will claim that the collective work has positively affected the social capital formation. This is particularly true in terms of trust-building and the strength of social ties, but also positive effects on the number of social ties. Above all, the collective work enhance the formation of social capital in the close interactions that collective actions require to succeed; being regular face-to-face meetings and the interdependency between the members.

All respondents, members and non-members, scored low in diversity of ties, which in theory imply that they have less access to new knowledge and motivation. The absence of diversity, I find connected to the general immobility of the rural indigenous population in Chiapas, and to the narrow focus on individual needs in the social network mapping. Outside the mapping, the member respondents revealed a diversity of ties as they both had ties in the village, to other Zapatistas all around Chiapas, and to the development NGO DESMI. Through these ties they enjoyed plentiful access to new knowledge and motivation. The members in the collectives of investigation had in general more contact with the outside world than the average *campesino* in the area.

## **PROPOSITION TWO – Social Capital, Collective work and Individual Empowerment Processes**

*Collective work and Strong Social Capital Positively Affects Individual Empowerment Processes*

I will look at the processes of empowerment in four different spheres; within the three power relations identified by Friedman (1992: p.33) - *social, political* and *psychological* power –, and with *economic* power as a fourth factor. When looking at economic empowerment, the concept will be defined to concern access to income (and credit), property, and technology. I will start with a brief presentation of the empirical data on participation from the fieldwork, as Prestby et al (1990:p.119) argue; individual empowerment obtained by collective actions is associated with their participation. In the interviews, participation has been defined to not only treat the collective work, but partaking in courses and meetings arranged by people or organizations from outside the village, meetings or social gatherings organized by people in the villages, and religious or social events and celebrations.

### **7.5. Rate of Participation and the Gender Equal Rotating System**

The rate of participation is related to empowerment because it tells us something about the possible access to information and knowledge, and of people's engagement. All the respondents who are part of a collective, regardless of age and gender, expressed to have participated in at least one course organized by DESMI the last six months. Several respondents have also participated in between two and four courses, especially those who have been elected or volunteered as promoter of ecological farming. Respondents from collectives in all the four villages expressed that they always try to participate in all courses offered by DESMI (relevant to their gender) when held in own village, but when held in other villages they participate when it is their turn to do so.

The participation-rate is in NL, NZ and TA influenced by a rotating system for participation in the courses outside the village. Both women and men from all families are included in the rotation, but one is able to pass one's turn to someone else if not able to go. Passing your turn to someone else seems to be more common among women than men. Two of the female respondents in NL uttered that they had had to find someone to cover their turn to leave for a Zapatista meeting in Oventic because (1) she is a single mum since her husband is in the USA, and it is difficult leaving the youngest child, and (2) it was a three-days meeting, and her husband didn't like it when she left for such a long time. Nevertheless, the majority of the member respondents mentioned to have participated in both political events and capacity building courses outside the village at least once the last six months, both women and men. Additionally, several men mentioned to have participated in more than one event or course within that timeframe.

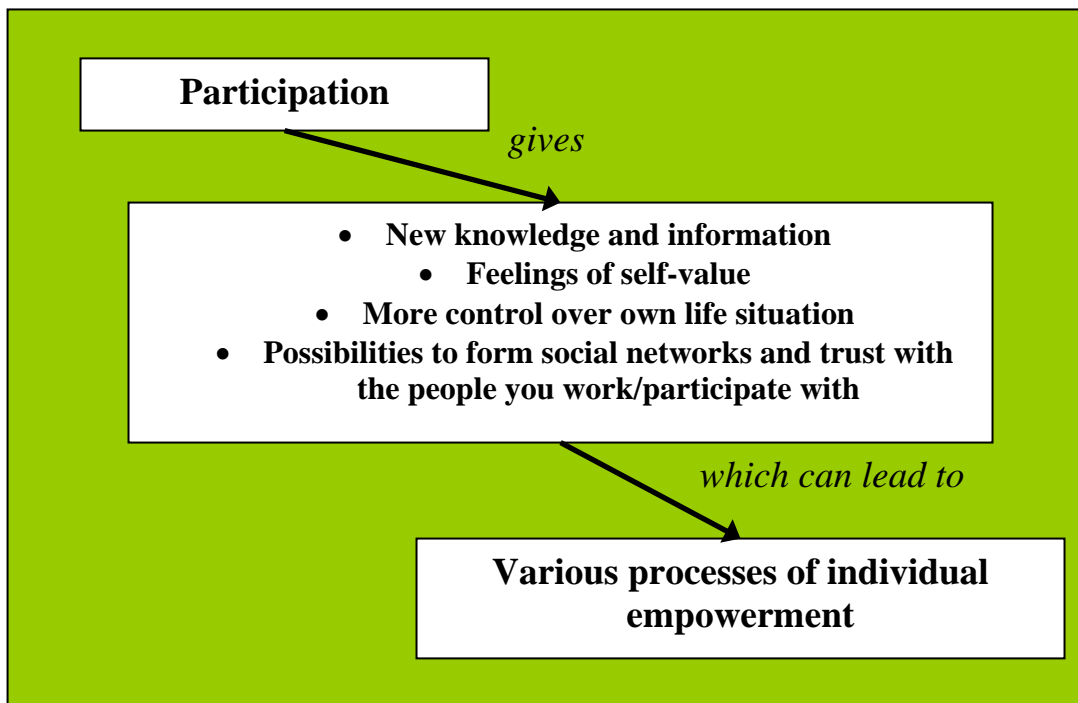
### 7.5.1. Participation of Members versus Non-Members

All respondents, collective members and non-members, pointed out that they go to church every Sunday, and participate in Catholic celebrations. This is the only similarity found in the response about participation as none of the non-member respondents mentioned to have participated in any types of meetings or courses the last six months.

None of the non-member respondents have ever participated in any coursing after primary or secondary school, except one of the respondents from NZ who told me her husband had participated in some political meetings in a nearby city before the presidential elections last year. Several of the member respondents expressed that they had never heard of any courses being offered their neighbors who are not in a collective, or in contact with DESMI, nor seen them leave for one;

*(...) "Often I have been asked by my neighbors who are not in our collective about information on how to feed the pigs better or how to save chickens when they are sick. DESMI has taught us that" (...) (NL4, woman, 39)*

**Figure VIII: Relations in the Empirical Data**



## 7.6. Social Empowerment

Processes of social empowerment are strengthened by the access to information and new knowledge, and by the opportunities to participate in social organizations. Friedman (1992: p.32) holds that social empowerment can promote social cohesion and trust, though I believe social relationships based on trust can also facilitate participation and

social empowerment. I will use this section to discuss how collective actions, the rate of participation and the social capital formation seem connected to, and positively affect, individual processes of social empowerment.

#### **7.6.1. Social Capital Lubricates Participation**

The discussion under Proposition One concludes that the collective work leads to social capital formation among the members, and the respondents expressed great confidence in the other members for knowing them well, solving their problems together and having common goals. As Putnam states that social capital lubricates social life (2002: p.7), I will argue that the formation of social capital lubricate participation in both social organizations as the collectives, and in the various courses and meetings.

The trust which the members have established with each other creates a safe and conforming atmosphere, and with it, people's ability to cooperate in the group increases. The joy the members find in attending various meetings and courses is also enhanced by social capital, and they become more eager to learn as they feel safe in the learning situation.

*(...) "The good thing about collective is that we get to know everyone in the village like they were our family, we trust each other and we help each other when we can" (...) (TA16, man, 28)*

#### **7.6.2. Communication and the Sharing of Information**

Sandler (2004: p. xi) emphasize that collective actions depend on every participant's efforts. The three villages NL, NZ, and TA experience growing collective activity due to good communication and sharing of knowledge, which engage every member to do their share. The social capital, as established trust and common norms, assist the flow of information in the collectives, both of personal information, and of the knowledge learnt at various courses and meetings. The rotating system (of taking turns going to the courses offered by DESMI), is based on internal trust in the collectives; a trust in that the information given to the chosen participants are brought back to the village and shared with the other members.

*"I know I can trust the other collective members, because we are all interested in our common well-being in NZ" (NZ10, man, 40)*

The collective work is, as exemplified in the following quote, based on a system of regular meetings and interaction for both the whole collective, and for the sub-group sharing shifts or working on specific topics.

*(...) "In the village we have meetings with the collective at least once a week. It can be to discuss if it is time to work the milpa again, if someone must buy things for the store, do the account of the month for the store, or it can be information and assignments from the "caracol" (...) (NZ8, man, 36)*

The regular whole-group meetings imply communication between the villagers that both form social capital and depend upon it. At these meetings, crucial issues, as the future work and how to use the collective income, are discussed, and the collectives' successes have created trust and openness among the members.

The non-collective-member respondents also enjoy a certain flow of personal information due to general interaction between families in immobile villages, and to the regular church-meetings. Nevertheless, I found that the collective membership and the social capital formed by it – both in the small work-collectives *and* as part of the large Zapatista Movement-collective - have boosted the access to new information, knowledge and skills from outside the village. Additionally it has increased the rate of inter-village flow of personal information.

### ***7.6.3. The Collective Store as Social Meeting Place***

The collective stores represent meeting places where the ones working meet and chat with the customers, and the customers talk to each other. I see it not only as social meeting places, but also an access point to social empowerment. This is because of the strengthened access to information and knowledge. At the stores in TA, NL and NZ social networks are built and fortified, especially among the women. The women experience enhanced self-reliance and self-strength from participating in income-generating work outside the domestic sphere. Together with the formation of strong social networks, the collective work therefore facilitates and increases the individual processes of social empowerment, in accordance with the ideas of Amartya Sen (1999).

### ***7.6.4. Empowerment by Capacity Building - the Access to new Knowledge***

Important to social empowerment are the processes of developing individual capabilities. Empowering people implies removing barriers of formal or informal character preventing them from improving their situation (Narayan, 2002a: p.xix), and in the villages of investigation I claim that the members of collectives have become socially empowered by two factors; (1) informally through knowledge-sharing in the regular group interaction in the collectives, and (2) formally through the capacity building courses held by outside actors, like e.g. DESMI. The collective activity have shaped informal norms of solidarity and sharing, and the new knowledge expands their freedom to choose the kind of life and future they want, as discussed by Sen (1999) to be among the clearest process of real people's empowerment.

The capacity building courses represent both informal and formal education to enhance the individual capabilities and skills, leading to processes of social empowerment as advocated by Narayan et al (2002b: p.15). The courses are only held when asked for by the collectives, a detail I argue gives the participants stronger commitment to learn, and be active participants in the courses. Strong social capital positively influences the rate of participation in the courses, as when the participants trust and knows each other, make the courses more attractive as 'safe' learning situations. Several respondents highlighted that the courses made them feel smarter and more useful for the society.



**Photo(s) XIII:** from a workshop held in a village in southern Chiapas for the promoters of organic farming from all villages in the area



#### **7.6.5. Low Social Interaction and Barriers to Information Flow**

Respondents from CA expressed that while they had both the collective *milpa* and store, they knew more about each others' daily joys and difficulties. This sharing of information had felt like a stronger social unity in the village. After the *milpa* collective collapsed, the women still experienced some social empowerment from their work and interaction in the store, but in minor degree, as their meetings were more sporadic.

*"(...) I was much more active and informed when I was part of a collective, because every time we met, even for small organizing questions, we also ended up talking about how we were doing, the family and so on. I knew more about how people where doing, and what was going on in the world outside here (...)" (C1, Woman, 37)*

The social interaction between the inhabitants in CA declined after terminating the collective work, as illustrated this respondent from CA:

*"(...) "My wife and daughters still work in the store, but we don't have so much contact between the families in the village like we use to have. Sometimes I can go days without talking to other men in the village, only my sons who work in the milpa with me" (...)" (C11, man, 45)*



The lack of regular interaction I see hampering the flow of information, and hence the processes of individual social empowerment. The people almost don't meet others than their closest families besides church time on Sundays, and all the badmouthing and village-gossip is even further hampering the communication among the inhabitants.

*(...) "I miss the days when everyone worked together. It was much happier. Now there is so much gossip and small conflicts between families, especially among the women. They talk bad about others, and some doesn't speak to each other" (...) (CA1, woman, 37)*

However, the few remaining Zapatista families in CA have experienced some social empowerment through their membership in the Movement, enhanced by the information and knowledge shared with the other Zapatista families in the region. They have also accessed new information through the capacity building courses offered in neighboring Zapatista villages.

#### **7.6.6. The Zapatista Identity and Knowledge-sharing**

The Zapatista Movement is also a sort of collective, or at least, their actions are collective in depending on every member's efforts (Sandler, 2004: p.xi). The autonomous governments in the Zapatista headquarters, and the autonomous schools and clinics are all attended by ordinary people, who have taken on courses to do the job. The Movement is lead by a grassroot-democracy where all villages have to discuss and come up with common responses on workshops or to participate in polls. NL, NZ and TA have systems for how all the courses and meetings organized by the Movement are attended by someone from their villages. These systems have rotations, so that everyone gets their chances to go, and the meetings they go to imply social interaction and knowledge-sharing, and social capital formed between the participants. This social capital and the access to knowledge also enhance the processes of individual social empowerment.

Additionally, the social capital is strong because of the bonding between Zapatista members in diverse villages, due to the tense situation they have been, and are, in. The choice of following the Movement is also a choice of living in resistance towards the government, and this difficult situation builds trust over village-borders as it enhances the feeling of being in 'the same boat'.

#### **7.6.7. Contact with the Outside World**

Another factor boosting the access to new knowledge and information is the *La Realidad* (the Reality) meeting, held in large part of the Zapatista communities. The local research NGO, CIEPAC<sup>4</sup>, offers these meetings in cooperation with the autonomous Zapatista authorities. The meetings are about presentation and explanation of the last two month's national and world news. This represents a source of new knowledge, capacity building,

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<sup>4</sup> CIEPAC - The Center for the Economic and Political Investigation for Community Action-  
<http://www.ciepac.org/index.php> (cited 23.05.2007)



and education, which boost the processes of individual social empowerment, in accordance with the ideas of Amartya Sen (1999).

*(...) "About every second month I also participate in a meeting called "la realidad" (the reality) where we are informed about world and national news, and what is happening. I think this is very interesting, especially since we have come to know people from around the world through all the people who come to work in the clinic"*  
(...) (NL2, woman, 26)

One can question the objectivity of such 'second-hand' display of the news, but the same question can be directed at a school-teacher's objectivity. Irrespective of the objectivity-factor, I believe the meetings are socially empowering the participants as they are highly educational for someone who has little schooling. The participants take active parts in the work shops, discussing the news, and the possible effect some of it might have on their own daily situation. The indigenous population in Chiapas, especially the indigenous women, is often shy, mostly housebound and unschooled. The social capital of trust has therefore positive effects on the rate of participation in such courses. The access to the knowledge is social empowering for the individual, but the strong stock of social capital just as crucial in assisting the actual attendance to these meetings.

Through the movement, several remote villages have also obtained contact and shared knowledge with the surrounding world. This is through international volunteers who have been involved with projects in Zapatista villages, like e.g. the autonomous health clinic in NL, or as visiting teachers or kindergarten assistants at the autonomous schools. Also the involvement with DESMI has brought visitors from other countries who work with their projects. These contacts are sources of both community and individual social empowerment in terms of information and new ideas in the villages.

*(...) "I never expected was to get access to a lot of new knowledge, and that we and our wives were going to receive so many courses. Neither did I expect to receive foreigner to my house. But now we have had visit of Norwegians one time, and another time two French people came to stay almost a week"* (...) (NZ 9, man, 42)

## **7.7. Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment is about raising one's self-belief, and the ability to take part in decisions about own future (Friedman, 1992: p.33). I find this connected to social empowerment in several aspects, like e.g. the access to information and new knowledge may strengthen the belief in one self and by it strengthen one's ability to participate in decision-making.

Mohan and Stokke (2000:p.255) describe social capital as a socio-cultural 'glue' holding communities together in the fight for political power, and I found this 'glue' both present in the work-collectives and the Zapatista Movement-collective. Participation in the collectives has formed social capital, which has strengthened the member-respondents' networks, and their possibilities to influence and decide their future. The high rates of participation among the member-respondents, in both capacity building courses and

political organizations, will most likely be factors that strengthen the participants' individual processes of political empowerment further.

#### **7.7.1. The Collective Work and Common Decision-Making**

The collectives in NL, NZ and TA have structures for decision-making which are open and including. These comprise regular whole-group meetings where future work and goals are discussed. The decisions made as collectives are both directly, and indirectly affecting each person's individual future; Directly in the sense that they make decisions about how to work and when, and indirectly as they decide how to use the collective money, what courses to ask for with DESMI and who will attend these courses. The meetings and the way they are built therefore open the doors for individual political empowerment for the all the members, as shown by these member-respondents comments:

*(...) "A collective works well if it constructs and reflects a fellowship, and unity in the village. Everyone must have the same rights to decide the directions of the collective and take part in the meetings. Earlier only the men met up if there was anything to discuss. Now we always include the women" (...) (NZ 10, man, 40)*

*(...) "Everyone must want to participate, and people must share knowledge from different courses and help each other" (...) (TA 15, man 35)*

#### **7.7.2. The Rotating System for Everyone's Political Empowerment**

The rotating system – present in NL, NZ and TA – for participation in events outside the village, is made possible by the strong social capital formation of trust and reciprocity. The members need to trust that their fellowman will share the information, or do good things with it, since their common money is used to educate her/him. The system ensures the inclusion of everyone in the new knowledge formation. It also helps everyone obtain the abilities to make informed political decisions, locally in the village, and nationally in relation to e.g. presidential or governors – elections. This has the prospect of strengthening the processes of political empowerment for all of those participating in the knowledge formation. Without exceptions, all member-respondents were eager to participate in the new knowledge formation, as exemplified by the next two quotes:

*(...) "I think there are great advantages for us to participate in as many courses and meetings as we can. Most from my parents' generation have very little education, if any, when taking about the women. Even my generation often ends up with only the few years of primary schooling we got as children. Everything we can learn from organizations, or from other villages, can help us move up, and improve our work" (...) (NZ8, man, 36)*

*(...) "What I like the most with the collective work is that we now can send people from our village to DESMI's courses, even when they are not held in our village" (...) (NZ9, man, 42)*

### 7.7.3. Increased Self-belief as Partaker in Collective Actions

Furthermore, political empowerment is about achieving the capacity to fight for one's rights (Narayan et al, 2002b: p. 15). Feeling smarter and more informed by participation in courses, boost this capacity, but moreover so by the feeling of self-belief. This I have found rooted in the fight as a Zapatista collective, as well as their work-collective. The Mexican indigenous population has experienced marginalization and exclusion for centuries, but the Zapatista Movement has obtained international attention for the fight for dignity and the indigenous' rights. Respondents from all four villages expressed great pride in their participation in a movement, which has managed to somehow put their needs on the national political agenda. They felt backed up and strengthened by the movement, and didn't fear fighting for their rights, even though they are small steps, like the one stated this quote from TA:



(...) "As Zapatistas we don't accept help from the government when we are in resistance. Here in TA we have also stopped paying for the electricity now, as we don't want to support the government with our money when they do nothing for us and don't respect the San Andres Accords<sup>5</sup>" (...)  
(TA16, man, 28)

The collective work achievements in TA, NL and NZ have accumulated self-belief among the members, facilitating the life in resistance, and strengthening the individual political empowerment. Several times they have gotten their work and capabilities confirmed; first by applying for loan and getting their application accepted, then by year after year setting future goals, and reaching them. This continuous confirmation of being able to master something, I will argue may raise the individual's self belief, and lead to political empowerment.

(...) "We are humble farmers without much education, we don't know so much, but with all the courses I hope we can do better in securing our children's future"  
(...) (NZ10, man, 40)

<sup>5</sup> The San Andres Accords are a document signed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1996, by both the Zapatistas and the Mexican government, based on the peacekeeping agreements, and contains accords the government promised to implement. Something which has never happened (<http://www.jaguar-sun.com/chiapas/sanandre.html>, <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/mexico/SanAndres.html> )

#### 7.7.4. Investing in the Future with the Collective Money

The collectives use their savings for several purposes, but expressed as most important by all respondents is the possibility to facilitate trips to various courses and the political meetings organized by the Zapatista Movement. The collective money is therefore used to render possible the political participation and empowerment for the members, as explained by respondents from NL and NZ here:

*(...) "The money earned is saved for common purposes later. If something happens with the car, we need someone to come and hold a course for us, we wish to send someone from the collective to a course outside the village, we use of the common money" (...) (NL3, woman, 41)*

*(...) "The money we earn from the collectives is used for common purposes like sending people to courses outside the village, sending people to courses and meetings with the Zapatistas, and helping out with the cost of traveling for the health promoters and the militias (EZLN)" (...) (NZ7, woman, 24)*

This collective-money mechanism, I see strengthening their capacity to fight for their own rights and expand their freedom of choices to shape the future (Narayan, 2002a: p.1). Social capital, as trust and confidence, is important to the ability to resolve collectively how to use the money. This makes the formation of social capital central to political empowerment.

Respondents from NL, NZ and TA expressed that their frequent contact and collaboration with other Zapatistas in the state would not have been possible if they every time had to pick money from own pockets to pay for the traveling. The collective money is therefore an investment in the future, and empowers the members to be politically engaged and active participants in the civil society (Naryan, 2002a: 1-2, Conger and Kanungo, 1988: p471).

*(...) "The profit we use for common good, not shared among us as money. I don't think we would be able to participate as much in courses and events outside the village if we every time had to dig into our pockets to do so (...)" (NZ8, man, 36)*

In the case of CA, there seem to never have been clear agreements, whether about why starting a collective or how to run it. The collective mechanism, which I see as the strongest source of political power, is regular meetings to discuss the direction of work, and where decisions are taken in fellowship. As discussed under point 7.5.5, the regular meetings are non-existing in CA today. The former collective members also expressed that their rate of participation have declined by the years, as exemplified by this quote:

*(...) "I don't participate in as many things now as I did before. I still sometimes participate if we have Zapatista meetings in the village, but they are few since we are so few families left. Sometimes I leave for courses outside the village, but I feel bad for my family when people in the village are talking so bad about me when I leave the village alone. Women are not supposed to travel without her*

*husband or company of other women. But no other women here are interested in going, and my husband is dead” (...) (C1, woman, 37)*

The collective in CA never got to the point where money where used to accumulate more knowledge in the form of capacity building, but they rather divided the money among the members. Since the income was limited, the members who were more guided by individual than group rationality (Gillinson, 2004:p.9) backed out. Today, I found few signs of cooperation or even contact between the families, and unfortunately, little evidence of political empowerment. One of my respondents explained their problems like this:

*(...) “In the first year of the milpa collective we used the whole profit to pay back DESMI, and buy some new type of bean seeds. The second year some men already stopped doing their share of the workload. Among others, there were some who never did their turn in getting water from the lake. The result was that the new beans never gave as much as we expected, and the whole profit became lower than anticipated. We shared it among the families, but many men said that this was not enough for them to bother work at the collective milpa anymore” (...) (C11, man, 45)*



**Photo XV: Little boy waiting with a bag of corn**

## **7.8. Psychological Empowerment**

The processes of individual psychological empowerment have been most difficult to display only from the spoken words in the interviews. However, I am left without doubt that the strong social capital in terms of social networks in the collectives, and the social and political empowerment from the capacity building courses, increase the individual sense of potency (Friedman, 1992: p.33). I could see this psychological empowerment in terms of pride and self confidence in the eyes of the respondents when they talked about what they had learnt, and how they now felt better equipped to ensure a healthier and more secure future for their children. I argue that the individual feeling of superiority has been strengthened by three separate issues; (1) that the capacity building courses directly aim at small steps they can do to improve e.g. their production, without having to change their lifestyle or beliefs, (2) that they are part of a unity of support in the village – the collective, and (3) that they are part of a movement which openly fights for a better future for them in Chiapas, and they receive international and national support for their struggle. As illustrated in the following quote, they have belief in what they stand for:

(...) *“My wish is that my children will grow up in a Chiapas where there are more opportunities for them, that our fight will help them in a future of more hope and less misery”* (...) (NZ10, man, 40)

The social capital formed between collective members facilitates the participation, which increases the probability to feel self-confident and psychologically empowered. Being able to live a life in dignity in accordance with one's values is related to processes of individual psychological empowerment (Narayan et al 2002b: p. 15).

(...) *“Our goal is to have a unity and fellowship among us. I think that is very important. To stay together in the fight for a more dignified future”* (...) (NL5, man, 59)

## **7.9. Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment is the power sphere most easily linked to poverty reduction. Robert Putnam argues that social capital can have a knock-on effect on economic prosperity (Putnam, 1993, 2000, cited in Edwards, 2004: pp.306). I have found a lot of evidence of individual economic empowerment, directly or indirectly rooted in the collectives' capacity to organize their joint actions towards common goals (Narayan et al, 2002: p.15; Villanger and Enes, 2004: p.6). The success rate of these collectives I argue is connected to the strength of the social capital, as high diversity of ties can provide access to information and motivation (Kristiansen, 2004: p.1155) and the strength of ties can hold them together in the struggle (Johannisson, 1996, cited in Kristiansen, 2004: p.1154).

### ***7.9.1. The Collectively Owned Machinery and Economic Prosperity***

In terms of higher individual income, I didn't find any immediate results of collective work. They are still small-scale farmers fighting with the same problems of poverty in relation to the market. However, the collective work has helped them gain access to technology like mills (for tortilla dough and pig food), *desgranador*, and cars for easier transportation, that might help their future income possibilities.

The mills and the *desgranador* are expensive machinery that is more or less unobtainable for the families to buy individually. The access to these machines is gained through the collective actions and rationality, and the loans are managed well due to good communication and cooperation based on strong social capital in the collectives. The machines, and the way they are run, lead to economic empowerment for the members, as they are technology that makes the daily chores easier - especially for the women. They are also time-saving, which liberate time for other economic activities, like cake-baking for sale with the collective, or the breeding of piglets. The women are often in charge of the domestic animals, and the breeding of piglets for sale. This has become a very important economic activity for *campesinos* after the corn prices decreased with Mexico's entrance into NAFTA.



## EMPOWERMENT BY COLLECTIVE WORK AND ORGANIC FARMING Case Study of NL5

“Antonio” is a family man at the age of 59 who lives in a small house in the outskirts of the NL with his family. He owns 2.5 hectare of *milpa*-land which he works together with his sons. Antonio has lived in NL his whole life, and even if he has accomplished three years of primary school, he is still more or less illiterate.

Today Antonio has been chosen as one of two promoters for organic farming in NL. They will attend more courses with DESMI, but have already started changing their production, so to be a display-window for the rest of the community showing that the organic farming works. From being an illiterate *campesino*, Antonio is today making large steps to improve his work methods and the fertility of his *milpa*, enhancing his sense of potency and becoming psychologically empowered.



*“We are destroying Mother Earth with chemicals, made her a drug addict. This is not good for the future of our children and the chemical companies have been earning more from my land than me” (Antonio, 59)*

Before he changed to organic production he had to add chemicals worth about 1000 pesos per hectare land to cultivate his corn and beans. From his 2.5 hectare of land he could harvest between 35 and 40 bulks of corn, depending on the crop that year. Average price the last years has been about 125 pesos per bulk, which give him an income of between 4375 and 5000 pesos for his corn production. When subtracting the cost of the chemicals (about 2500 pesos for the 2.5.hectare land), he ‘loses’ half of his income every year.

The first year of organic production the *milpa* gave less then normal, but this second year the production was up to normal. Antonio has heard from promoters in other villages that from the third year the production even step up. Regardless of loss of production, he has saved this cost of chemicals the last two years, and in addition the family’s diet has been improved with the access to own-produced vegetables growing between the corn plants in the *milpa*. The knowledge of organic farming is economically empowering to Antonio, and the feelings of managing something enhance his self confidence and psychological empowerment.

Being part of a collective therefore strengthens the individual’s processes of economic empowerment, but also opens up other possibilities where the group as a unity can use their manual powers for indirectly lead to economic prosperity. The following quote from TA shows that together they have accomplished improvements of the *milpa* that they

would have difficulties managing as individual families. These improvements have further led to individual economic empowerment of the member families.

*(...) “We had large problems with stones in our field we decided one day that we were going to clean it, and we did. In March some years ago, between the time we harvest the field and we can sow it again, we went together about 30 men and boys and lifted away all the rocks we could. And the largest stones we used our donkeys and the car to drag out of the field. Now we get more out of our land than what we did before. And more vegetables have appeared in the field because of better growth conditions (...)” (TA16, man, 28).*

### **7.9.2. New Knowledge and Skills – New Economic Opportunities**

I have found many prospects of future economic empowerment in the emphasis on changing to ecological, and more diversified farming. The case study of NL5 is a good example of this (see page 79). However, transforming the methods of production cannot be done in a day, and as expressed by NL5, there is chance of lower production the first year. The change will affect many aspects of the daily life, and the families must find the strength and capacity to comply with such a change for it to be successful.

Most children comply with primary schooling in Chiapas today, but less than half of the indigenous population over 15 years of age have never received formal education (SIPAZ, 2007). As many adults in the villages of investigation are illiterate, they told me they had felt incapable of making changes or learning new things before attending DESMI's courses. However, now they felt they had been given the ability and power to make improvements in the production, and hopefully to their source of income in the future, like expressed in these two quotes:

*(...) “I cannot read nor write well, but I can still learn when things are shown us or explained” (...) (NL5, man, 59)*

*(...) “My wife speaks Tzotzil and only a little bit Spanish, but she has participated in several meetings and courses with other women in the region now and apart from what they have learnt at the courses, she has also become better in Spanish. Most men in our collective have completed primary schooling, but most women has not completed more than the first year. All the courses we are receiving means a lot to us. It is new knowledge explained to us easily, and it is also getting to know and exchange experiences with people from other villages around here” (...) (NZ10, man, 40)*

The strong social capital formed between members of the collectives, I argue to encompass the opportunity of being a social ‘glue’ - holding the communities together – in the future work (Mohan and Stokke (2000: p.255). This social ‘glue’ is important in the knowledge-sharing about the new agricultural production methods, and in the fight to make it a sustainable and positive change.



### 7.10. Free Ride to the Collective Achievements?

The free rider problem – where someone enjoys the benefits without contributing in the work - is one well known in connection with cooperative or collective work. I don't find the benefits of social, political, psychological empowerment easy targeted from outside the collectives, but the economical empowerment can be. From my experiences with the collectives and villages of investigation, the majority of the benefits are only accessible for members, as e.g. access to the mills and *desgranador*, the car, and the courses and political events paid with collective money. This diminishes the challenges of free riding, as warned by the political economic theory (Prestby et al, 1990: p.119).

The only free riding I observed was connected to the benefits of the store. Everyone has the right to purchase in the collective store - members or non-members – herby accessing the benefit of not traveling to nearby cities. In CA the collective store was still the only store in the village and everyone has used it, also after leaving the collective work. In TA and NL, everyone can use the store, but all members take shift working it. In NZ everyone use the store, but only one family from the collective actually works there.

These examples are free-riding, but I don't see it negative to the members' economic empowerment. The members actually gain from the "free-ride-shopping" of the non-members as it increases the income of the store. Moreover, the income generated represent a benefit which only members can access, and it can be used for courses and events that will lead to political, psychological and social empowerment for the individual members of the collectives.



**Photo(s) XVII:**  
Woman in the window of the collective store and one of DESMI's cake-baking courses



### **7.11. Summing up Proposition Two**

The empowerment processes in all four spheres are enhanced by participating in social, political and educational events, and that participation is clearly 'lubricated' by strong social capital. The collective members in the villages of investigation appears to be in a stronger position to obtain individual empowerment, - socially, politically, economically and psychologically-, as their rate of participation in various events is higher than with non-members, and they have the collective mechanisms to back each other up. These are among others the systems of offering economical or manual help to families with problems, and the collective savings which they use for the general betterment, and access to new knowledge, for all.

Both the communication and cooperation on a daily basis, and the participation in special courses, are facilitated by having trust in the people you must interact with. Even actually obtaining access to courses, where empowerment processes can catch speed, is facilitated by having many ties. The processes of social empowerment therefore stand out as enhanced with the member respondents, in comparison with the non-members. The participation in collective decision-making, and actually being part-owner in the collective artifacts, - like the mills, *desgranador*, and cars -, has also lead to political empowerment of the members. These mechanisms, where one's voice has become important to decisions regarding own future has according to the member respondent increased self-belief and self confidence.

The trust and strong relationships between the collective members positively affect individual economic empowerment and prosperity in keeping a positive spirit in hard times, and help each other to comply with the goal achievements. The future economic empowerment might also further be enhanced by the organic farming courses. This may lead to not only economic, but also social improvements, as the increased income can be used for the betterment of the general situation for the family.

## **PROPOSITION THREE – Social Capital, Project Performance and Sustainability**

### *Strong Social Capital Improve Project Performance and the Sustainability of Development Projects*

As a foundation for the pending discussion on social capital and development project performance, I will present DESMI's projects, and place them in the development discourse. In the discussion I will look at the aspects of DESMI's that I have found mostly aimed at sustainability by their design; being (1) that the Solidarity Economics projects emphasize capacity building and are people-centred, and (2) that the *campesino-a-campesino* is targeting a lasting and own-controlled development. The analyses and results from the former two propositions will be interspersed in as empirical data to answer this third proposition, and I will discuss whether the social capital formation, directly and indirectly, may improve the project performance and the goals of sustainable development.

### **7.12. DESMI's Development Projects - An Alternative Development Model**

The philosophy behind DESMI's development projects is rooted in the alternative development paradigm as they aim at generalized community development, and the improvement of the participants' self reliance (Pieterse (2001: p.75). The NGO was started in 1969, in the golden age of the alternative paradigm (Friedman, 1992: p.1), and was part of the civil society which gained strength through the new focus. The development projects, aiming at capacity building and especially at organic farming, are today financially supported by the international organization *Bread for the World* (<http://www.bread.org/>), and *Oxfam*.

In an interview with Mr. Meléndez Meza, general director of DESMI, he asserted that the aim of the organization is to assist the collectives, being facilitators, but let the people be active in deciding how they want to be helped. Their objective is helping not only with economic development, but also the construction of a democratic society where both social and political aspects are strengthened (Pieterse, 2001:p.75; Monaheng, 2001). Mr. Meléndez Meza further explained that the ideas behind naming their projects 'Solidarity Economics' and publishing the book *Si Uno Come, Que Coman Todos*<sup>6</sup> (2001), have been to develop a concept of alternative development which addresses the broader socio-economic situation of the small-scale farmers in Chiapas, and their overall quality of life.

*"Our work is fundamentally based in the dialog, the word, the reflection, the learning, the analyses bound in reality, the listening with patience, and with a future dimension where it is possible to establish a dynamics between the concrete work and the utopia"* (DESMI, 2001:p. 20)

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<sup>6</sup> *Si Uno Come, Que Coman Todos* means *If one shall eat, let all eat*

The collaborative decision-making structure in the Solidarity Economic projects is considered a kind of “democratic schooling”, where every member has to contribute in the dialogs within the collectives, in the discussions and workshops with people from other villages, and with the NGOs. Increasing the participant’s involvement in socially and politically relevant actions is argued to be a goal for the alternative path by Friedman (1992: p.33). I have not only found the same objectives stated in DESMI’s projects, but had it confirmed with the high rate of participation of collective-member respondents.

The Solidarity Economics- approach is people-centred and location sensitive as it regards the already existing capabilities and opportunities in the villages. The projects also aim at sustainability as they are adjusted to the present natural environment, the climate, and the inhabitants’ aspirations (Pieterse, 2001).

Collective work is the key word in all of DESMI’s projects, and the extension of this is the Solidarity Economics, which consists in the network of rural collectives and cooperatives in Chiapas. The core of this grassroots development model is that the village groups develop their human, social and economic resources interdependently. The Solidarity Economics advocate a social innovation in the economy, which is mainly about the reintroduction of social justice into production and allocation systems (DESMI, 2001: p.39). As an attempt to fight the injustice and marginalization *campesinos* in Chiapas suffer from, the Solidarity Economics treat to strengthen the production in the villages, and encourage more inter-exchange between brother-and sister collectives in other areas of the state. Within small geographical areas there can be great differences in soil and especially the access to water. This makes it possible to produce quite different agricultural products in separate villages within close distance for inter-exchange.

### **7.13. Building Capacities in the Solidarity Economics**

The capacity building courses are vital parts of DESMI’s development projects, and the course-topics have been chosen in communication with the villagers and their specific needs (DESMI, 2001: p.39). The topics are in coherence with the alternative development and PCD approaches as they aim at enhance the self reliance and promote development in harmony with the environment (Pieterse,2001: p.75; Monaheng, 2001). Building capacities are steps towards sustainability if the participants are active in the processes and the know-how is transferred correctly and thoroughly.

As discussed under ‘Proposition Two’, the access to capacity building courses has the prospect of leading to various processes of empowerment. The access to knowledge about organic farming can lead to economic empowerment. Learning about human rights and the general feeling of learning new things may lead to social and psychological empowerment. The partaking in decisions about the courses’ content and timeframes can be political empowering. Narayan (2002a: p.8) argue that empowerment can be a key to project effectiveness, and in relation to the capacity building strategy I will argue that if people are empowered, their chances to fight poverty and marginalization are enhanced, and there is less need for new courses. To the project performance of DESMI this means

goal achievement, and is economical which to the organizations signify saved money and time.

### ***7.13.1. People-Centred Development and Social Capital Formation***

DESMI's development projects stresses the participation of the majority, and are designed to place the collectives as responsible to define what projects they want to implement, and in the driver seat for actually put them into practice. In accordance with the PCD approach, the NGO and the development practioners are seen as only facilitators for smoothing the community development processes (Sracuse University, 2006, Roodt, 2001, Monaheng, 2001). From application to implementation, the projects aim at bottom-up development (Roodt, 2001: p.474) as the stakeholders are regarded as indispensable and active participants, and they are partakers in defining the goals of their own development. These participatory approaches carried through, can lead to accumulation of social capital, at the same time as they are facilitated by it (Carrol, 2001: 25).

Research by Grootaert's (2004: p.26) show positive examples of the impact social capital formation can have on e.g. microcredit projects. I find DESMI's 'Circulate Fund' to match many of the microcredit characteristics, even though they don't use that name on their work. When the collectives are well-functioning and stable because of the social capital 'gluing' the members together (Mohan and Stokke, 2000: p.255), they improve development effectiveness as they manage to repay the loans on time, freeing the financial means for DESMI to redistribute to other villages or new projects in existing collectives.

The social capital has also been useful to enable communication and problem-solving in the collectives in NL, NZ and TA. Since the collective work is the backbone of the Solidarity Economic projects, the social capital which holds them together in fighting problems and achieving development improve the project performance and the sustainability of the development processes. Participation is the key to empowerment, and generally, there are uplifted atmospheres in the villages regarding their participation in DESMI's courses.

*(...) "I like participating in the courses to we can get information about what is happening, and learn new things that can help us improve the work. Maybe get a better future for our children" (...) (NL6, woman, 38)*

The capacity-building projects are people-centred, and people's enhanced participation and ultimately empowerment, are objectives of DESMI. Good project performance is hence to achieve these processes. The social capital formation in the collectives is productive in assisting these goals (Coleman, 1990, cited in Inkeles, 2001: p.247), in that the trust and strong ties lubricate participation by making the partaking less intimidating. Additionally, the social relationships and friendships help the participants keep a good spirit and assist each other in hard times, so that everyone achieves advancement, and the sustainability of their small steps is maintained. The trust and networks formed between the members make possible the achievement of rotating systems, which distribute the both workload and the participation in courses, on everyone. This enhances the stability

of the collective work, oppose the free-riding problematic, and enable the collective to flourish. This system also sees to that the processes of empowerment boosted by participation are made available for the individual member of the collective. When everyone is socially and economically empowered, DESMI's goals are met, and the project performance of the organization is improved.

### ***7.13.2. Organic Farming for Environmental Sustainability***

Positive correlations have been proved between local development processes and social capital formation (Mohan and Stokke, 2000: p.255), and from the collectives I learnt that the social capital of trust and strong ties were positive to their abilities to deal with new activities and meet the challenges in expanding and try out new directions in their work as a collective, like e.g. the organic farming. The courses related to organic farming inhabit maybe the strongest elements of strengthened self reliance, in accordance with the aims of both alternative and people-centred development approaches (Pieterse, 2001:p.75; Friedman, 1992: p.33; Monaheng, 2001). The courses are focused at sustainability after the UN definition (UN, 2007), as they aim at improving the local capacity to implement agriculture and livestock practices with non-toxic methods for cultivation. If this is carried out successfully, it will preserve the land and eventually yield more for the poor *campesinos*.

Narayan (2002a: p. 1-2) and Conger and Kanungo (1988: p. 471) have pointed at how poor people have their freedom of choices severely reduced by their powerlessness and lack of voice in relation to the market, and this has proved to be very true in the Chiapas context. The *campesinos* have been marginalized and overlooked in the society for centuries, and the NAFTA agreement from 1994 has been devastating to their ability to sell their products to reasonable prices in the market. The participants in DESMI's courses learn how to make their own organic fertilizers and liquids from organic waste already produced, by the people and domestic animals in the villages. Chemical fertilizers make up a huge expense for the farmers, and several respondents claimed that the use of chemicals jeopardized their autonomy and self-reliance, and thereby weaken their political empowerment to decide for own future. The small-scale farmers have been subjects to many difficulties after the introduction of cheap, genetically manipulated corn and seeds, like one of my respondents expressed;

*(...) "The courses help us avoid being fooled by the government. Many years ago we tried new corn seeds that the government gave us, and the next year when we were sowing this corn again it didn't give anything. We understood right away that something was wrong, because after two weeks nothing had come up. DESMI then helped us with a loan to buy new, non-genetically manipulated corn, and we had to sow the whole milpa over again" (...) (TA15, man, 35)*

The transition to organic farming implies not only economic empowerment for the member families in escaping the cost of chemicals, but is also geared towards sustainability. The organic fertilizers have, according to DESMI's agricultural specialists, shown to improve the soil fertility and prevent land erosion in the rainy season. As land is becoming a scarce resource in the rural areas due to large families to feed and share the

land with, it is important that one can get a good outcome of the land without destroying the survival ground for the next generation of *campesinos*. The Solidarity Economics and the capacity building courses are therefore geared towards sustainability for the future of the villages. They are also clear processes of people-centred development as the collective members manage to increase their capabilities to produce sustainable, and gain improvements in their quality of life (Monaheng, 2001), like expressed in the following quote:

*(...) "The courses about the ecological farming are important as we need better understanding about not only the nature consequences, but how this can affect our economy and how we can make the changes in the best possible manner. While we still live we have to do the best to advance further and secure the future of our children" (...) (NL5, man, 59)*

The *campesinos*' success in changing to organic production is decisive to measure the project performance of DESMI. Since the transformation is still on the starting line for most *campesino* families I can only look at the social capital's effect in the starting phase. First of all, most *campesinos* has little formal education, which means that participation in the challenging courses like the organic courses are, might be the most intimidating setting of all the courses together. As highlighted earlier, without having established a 'safe learning setting' success and actual learning from these courses might be difficult. However, when trust has been formed between the members of the local work-collectives, and from being part of the larger Zapatista Movement 'collective' that almost all collectives supported by DESMI are, they fear less the situation of not understanding. This also signifies that the participants will dare being active, and ask questions when something is difficult to grasp. This again improves the project performance of DESMI, and the effectiveness and durability of the goal achievements (Oakley, 1991).

#### **7.13.3. Collective Savings a Safety Net towards Sudden Poverty**

DESMI's stated objectives are social and economic development, but I have not been able to verify the positive correlation between the direct income level and social capital formation, as claimed by Grootaert (2004: p.26) and Hofstede and Inglehart (cited in Inkles, 2001: p.10-12). However, I have found evidence which show strengthening of the economic situations in terms of security, and protection against sudden poverty. One example of this is the collective savings, which is a collective asset only available for the members. The savings mere existence is also based on the social capital of trust, in that the collective as a whole will make good decisions with the common money.

Woolcock and Narayan (in Putnam, 2002: p.6) and Svendsen and Svendsen's (2004: p.48) claim that social capital can be a safety net because of its' implicit prospect to guarantee more stability in development processes, and I will expand this claim by seeing the collective savings – facilitated by the social capital- as a safety net. Member respondents from all the villages put the collective savings as strong ties to possible help in crisis situations, and I find it to be a 'safety net' because of the stability this net can provide the individual processes of economic empowerment. When collective savings can be used as sources to borrow money in crisis situations, it can prevent that e.g. sudden illness or

funerals will set them back economically because they had to borrow from expensive sources.

(...) *“When I need to borrow money for something, the best thing would be if we had enough in the collective money box, but if not I know that my nearest family would help, and several of the neighbors from the collective would also help if they had any extra means. We can often get help from the collective box. That is one of the reasons we save up to always have something as an extra help when someone is in crisis”* (...) (TA16, man, 28)

As the collective savings are benefits only available for members, I argue that this place them in stronger positions to confront problems of poverty and vulnerability, as pointed at by Woolcock and Narayan (in Putnam, 2002: p.6). I also see that this improves the stability and sustainability of the collectives, and hence of the project performance of DESMI, as the collective life compromise the backbone of the projects.

NL has the most elaborated system for administrating the collective savings, and the strongest economic safety net of the four villages. The collective always has two persons elected to be in charge of deciding if a family is in such a situation that the collective as a whole should offer to help. This can both be financial help, and help to comply with the family's daily chores, like working the *milpa*. If these chores are not complied with, it may negatively affect the family's future income, and make them vulnerable to new poverty. The emergence of such an elaborated system in NL has many reasons, but one of the clearest explanations is that they have enough members in the collective to generate sufficient income so that they have something to offer members in need. The large collective also contain many hands to help out complying with the manual work.

TA also has a similar system of helping out when members of the collective are stricken by disease or death in the family, though they do not have a committee responsible to decide when or with what the collective should help out as a unity. The collective in NZ has a system of helping out the member families, but their collective, for being little, does not generate sufficient income to be able to help out financially. In stead, they always volunteer to help out with manual labor and complying with the daily chores.

#### **7.14. Sustainable transfer of know-how in the *Campesino-a-Campesino* model**

The principles behind the capacity buildings courses are according to the Mr. Meléndez Meza, influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire and the importance of dialogue in education. The newest focus point in the solidarity economic projects is to promote a direct participatory approach called the *campesino-a-campesino* (farmer-to-farmer) learning model. The approach has been implemented during the last two years in the topic 'organic farming', with the more profound training of some few *promoters* from each village. (Like the case study NL5 has been chosen to be for the village of NL). The idea is based on a trickle-up approach (Pieterse, 2001: p.81), and that a farmer can always understand a farmer best. The promoters will therefore receive extensive coursing and support in their topic of responsibility, and shall serve as sources of information and display-windows for the inhabitants in their village.





**Photo XVIII:**  
**Fetching firewood with the donkey**

I find that the *campesino-a-campesino* model invests in people as active and valuable partners in development, and its' focus is on the sustainable transfer of know-how, in line with the capacity building strategies (Narayan et al, 2002: p.15). With this project model, the participants will learn from people they already know and trust, and the social capital formed in the villages have the prospect of assisting the success and goal achievements.

The sources of information - the promoters - stay in the village in stead of being situated in an office they have to contact by traveling, or calling. DESMI as an organization has their predefined development goals, but as the responsibility for the learning process is set out to the farmers and local promoters, the goals remain in consistence with their own aspirations, and can alter from village to village (Monaheng, 2001). Villanger and Enes (2004:p.6) advocate the need for aid agencies to pay attention to people's existing strengths to avoid dependency, something I will claim that DESMI does with the *campesino-a-campesino* approach. I therefore find it to be a good instrument for reaching better development effectiveness. With introduction courses for the many, and intensive training of the few, DESMI can unload much of the work of following up the individual farmer's need for more knowledge, as they have trained local personnel to follow-up each village on their own, sustaining the know-how in the villages.

I find the *campesino-a-campesino* model to be an outstanding example of a bottom-up-development project, which ensures that the local knowledge and value systems are included in the program implementation (Pieterse, 2001: p.75; Monaheng, 2001). The work method stresses the importance of participation, and is just as much dependent on the voluntary and determined participation of local actors. Taking on the responsibility of being promoter should be done by someone who is devoted to the issue, and is eager to learn and share his/her new knowledge. Related to this is where I have found the only weakness of DESMI's approach. From my participation in two courses for promoters during the fieldwork I discovered that not all of the promoters present were outgoing

persons that looked positively at their role as “teachers” for their village. Most promoters had volunteered to take on this responsibility, but some had been nominated in their village without really wanting it. There is a chance that they will grow from the task, and eventually do a good job. However, there is also the risk that they don’t have the interest in learning and will serve as mal-functioning promoters.

### **7.15. Summing up Proposition Three**

From the above discussion, I can sum up that DESMI’s development approaches are rooted in values and goals from the alternative development theories and people-centred approaches. I have found a clear focus on sustainability in the Solidarity Economics in general, and in the *campesino-a-campesino* projects in particular. Cooperation in collectives is a key ingredient, and the goal of active participation is successful because of the social capital formation in the collectives. The social capital and norms of solidarity urge people to help each other in need, and can lead to development stability, both for the collectives and the individual member families, and serve as a catalyst for improved project performance. How DESMI takes the local beneficiaries into account, and values their participation in every section of the projects, can open for new prospects of ownership-feelings among the participants, which again can enhance the sustainability of the projects (Oakley, 1991, Pieterse, 2001: p.75 and Roodt, 2001: 474).

## Chapter VIII:

### Summing up and Conclusions



Why consider collectives in a world that asserts that there is no alternative to the capitalistic individualism? The simple answer is that somehow the collective organization works. Prior studies by Kroeker (1995) asserted that the agricultural collectives in Nicaragua had represented settings to foster empowerment at various levels. Svendsen & Svendsen (2004) argue the same thing about the collectives in rural Denmark and Poland one and a half century ago. People turn to collectives because of their values of democracy and community, and because it is possible for them to succeed in a world in which they do not quite fit. In practical terms, they can deliver goods and services, and contribute to economic and social development in ways that are grounded locally (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004). The collectives can also serve as alternative institutions of accumulation for community-based assets and empowerment of the individuals. When I asked my respondents about why organize in collectives, three things that stood out as common agreements; the collectives increased their ability to meet basic agricultural needs, they gained access to machinery too expensive for the individual family, and they got strength to make adjustments and advance in their work.

Based on the discussion in proposition one, I will claim that the collective work in the rural villages *has* positively affected the social capital formation. This is particularly in terms of the strength of their social ties, but also in the number of ties. The collective actions form social capital in the close interactions, and the interdependency between the members of a collective. In particular, the trust-building has flourished in the regular face-to-face meetings. The network maps drawn by member respondents contain a majority of strong ties, and almost exclusively to someone inside the collective. In general have norms of solidarity and reciprocity been established, and no member respondents felt she/he had few people to get help from in personal and daily needs.

The collective members in the villages of investigation inhabit a larger diversity of network relations compared to the non-member respondents. When their individual needs are expressed collectively, they have established ties to, and obtained help from, the development NGO DESMI and the Zapatista Movement. The member respondents, due to the contact with DESMI and the Movement, have more contact with the outside world, e.g. with international visitors, than the average villager in these areas.

All together, this makes the collective members' social networks strong in both number, strength and diversity. To answer 'Research Question One' of this thesis study, I have found the regular whole-group meetings, and the regular meetings with work-groups within the collectives, are the collective mechanisms that have the strongest, and most positive, effect on the social capital formation.

Robert Putnam (2002:p.7) states that the trustworthiness of the members lubricates the social life and organization in the collectives, and I claim him right. The social capital formation in NL, NZ, TA and CA can be seen as both resulting in and a result of collectively negotiated ties and relationships (Edwards, 2004: p.305). As the social capital is strong in the collectives, they don't turn their back on their fellow member if he/she has problems. The respondents emphasized that as a collective they must help each other, and that the collective goals can only be achieved as a unity where all parts can do their share. The social capital formed in the collectives, is therefore productive in assisting goals, as advocated by Coleman (1990, cited in Inkeles, 2001: p.247).

The second research question treats the answer to which empowerment processes are traceable to the participation in collectives, and the answer is multiple. Empowerment has to do with being enabled, and after evaluating empowerment processes through the lens of participation rates, I am left without doubt that the collective members are in stronger positions than non-members to fight poverty and marginalization.

To be part of the collectives of investigation implies regular communication, and the flow of information between members is being facilitated by their stock of social capital. This has strengthened the individual processes of social empowerment for members of the collectives of investigation, processes which again have won further potency by the access to capacity building courses.

Politically, the members of a collective are empowered by their participation in the decision-making about how to organize current work and set future goals. They are continuously empowered by finding their voice to be valid, and their vote in decisions to matter. As a collective of *campesinos*, the individuals have fused their powers and obtained a room where they have managed to put into life projects unobtainable for the individuals alone. The success and outcome of these projects depends on the following-up and devotion of the members.

The capacity building courses in organic farming have the prospect of leading to economic empowerment for the participants, but the success depends on the *campesino* families' dedication to carry out the transformation. Shown with the case study of respondent NL5, the empowerment is not only in saving money from not buying chemicals, but also in a more diversified diet, or products for inter-exchange, from all the vegetables that grow naturally in the organic *milpa*.

The experiences of political, economic and social empowerment make up the base for the realization of individual psychological empowerment. The national politics have disregarded the rural, indigenous' needs for centuries, and their culture and way of living

has been talked down at in media and school curriculum. Narayan (2002b:p15) and Villanger and Enes (2004: p.6), argue that collective actions are supportive in reducing poverty and fight marginalization. The collective work in the villages of investigation seems to have strengthened the members self confident in that they can do something to improve their future and state of poverty, and the feelings of pride evolve from their achievements in the other power spheres.

The 2005 review of IFAD revealed that the development projects with high rates of participation were proven more successful and empowering for the poor communities (IFAD, 2005). Narayan (2002a: p.2) further claims that social capital like trust are qualities important to development project performance, and I will say that the social capital formation is a 'sine qua non'<sup>7</sup> for promoting community participation among the somewhat shy and careful indigenous, rural population in Chiapas. DESMI's capacity building approach to development is a participatory approach, and they have organized their projects to enhance strong participation of the local beneficiaries in the projects. The social capital formed in the collectives of investigation assist the successes of their own work, and increases the rate of participation. As the collectives make up the core of the solidarity economics projects, this improves the general project performance of DESMI.

Empowerment strategies are most successful with participatory and bottom-up approaches (Narayan, 2002a. p.7). With the organic farming coursing, DESMI have applied a bottom-up approach with the *campesino-a-campesino* method, and the policies clearly articulate how their beneficiaries will be subject to every decision-making process. DESMI will through this method use local promoters in being the one to implement and follow up the projects. The NGO and practioners' roles are simply being facilitators.

As discussed under proposition three, I have found that the *campesino-a-campesino* method has many prospects of success. This is particularly with reference to with the sustainability of safe-guarding the know-how directly in the villages. However, the challenge is the dependency of the dedication of the local promoters. Nominated promoters, who aren't engaged enough to really learn the organic farming methods, jeopardize both the prospects of economic empowerment and of development sustainability. Nevertheless, DESMI's capacity-building strategies are in general thoroughly elaborated. They are people-centred and enhance people's participation. I have also found strength in that DESMI has used Paolo Freire's approach to learning in their capacity building approach, by adjusting the courses to the needs and aspirations of the farmers and taking into account the agricultural calendar. This makes room for the participation of everyone, regardless of gender and reading capacity.

My fourth research question seeks the answer not only how the collective work and the stock of social capital relate to project performance, but also to the development sustainability in the rural communities in Chiapas. Sustainability has to do with the interrelation of economic, social and environmental considerations. I will argue that DESMI's emphasis on participation in all levels of the projects has sustainable prospects

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<sup>7</sup> Latin legal term for "without which it could not be" (Dictinonary.com, 2007-05-25  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/wordoftheday/archive/2000/11/25.html> )

in enhancing the participants' feelings of ownership of the processes. When the beneficiaries take part in deciding course topics and time frames, they might feel more obligated to take part in the courses and the actual learning. Since there is little free-riding to the benefits achieved by the collective work, this may also be an aspect keeping the members devoted to the work and give stability to the development.

In particular, the organic farming projects aim at sustainability of the land use in these rural communities. I have further found importance in DESMI's objective of facilitating development of collectives. As collective work strengthens the formation of social ties and norms of cooperation, this has the prospect of being a foundation for more stable development into the future.

## **8.2. Research Limitations**

As with all survey-based research, there are limitations to the interpretation of the results. The different interpretation of questions may influence their response to some issues, and there may be underlying causes of influence that would require more comprehensive research to discover. However, I will argue that despite time limitations, I obtained a good and solid data material, and I have made several steps to improve the reliability and validity of this data. During the process of participatory observation, I wrote a fieldwork diary, and continuously made notes not to lose ongoing ideas and reflections. Since I have visited these rural areas in Chiapas at several occasions earlier, I have made good contacts in a neighboring village to the four where the investigation took place. People from this village, and the collective there, agreed to be part of pre-testing my interview guide, and help me so that the questions became clear and spoken in familiar language. I also recorded most of the face-to-face interviews. This has enabled the use of direct quotes, so that the respondent's own voices and formulations are heard in this thesis study. I will argue that this has increased the trustworthiness of the data, despite the challenge of translating the interviews from Spanish to English, and from oral to written language.

## **8.3. Prospects for Future Research**

One prospect for future research that struck me during the field research is to further explore alternative solutions for the role of many small-scale farmers in the World market. This can be e.g. by forming collectives and pool their power to fight in the market, or seek alternative markets for their products. This is a theme that was also taken up by one of the speakers at a conference about sustainable development, which I attended in Oslo, October 2005. James Shikwati addressed this in relation to the call for development in Africa. He searched for efforts and ideas to achieve a wider inter-Africa cooperation in trade, as 800 million Africans make up a huge market, which the Africans themselves should take advantage of (NORAD, 2005). I found a similar idea behind DESMI's goals to empower the participants to find alternative solutions to their contribution in the Mexican market, like e.g. the inter-exchange of products. This has started up between a few villages in Chiapas already, and been successful. Other collectives have managed to obtain direct contact with restaurants in nearby cities, to where they sell part of their vegetable production to a better price. These collective opportunities and alternative

development paths, to improve the situation for the many small-scale farmers, I will recommend should be subject to more research in the future.



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## APPENDIX 1:

### The Interview Guide

Place of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Coded name of respondent \_\_\_\_\_

#### INTERVIEW ONE

##### Questions:

- 1.0. Who is part of your household?
- 2.0. What are your properties? Land, animals, etc.
- 3.0. You are part of a collective supported by DESMI. Why did you want to participate in a collective?
- 4.0. What were your anticipations to participate in a collective?
- 5.0. What parts of your daily work today is within the collective actions?
- 6.0. Who participate in this collective?
  - 6.1. How do you share the work load?
  - 6.2. How do you decide how to work?
  - 6.3. What do you earn from the work, and how is the gain shared between the participants?
  - 6.4. How often do you meet the other members of the collective?
- 7.0. What do you see as difficult with working collectively?
  - 7.1. Have you met any difficulties within your collective?
  - 7.2. How was the difficulties handled?
- 8.0. How would you define a good collective?
  - 8.1. What are the requirements to obtain a good collective?
  - 8.2. How can you participate in making the collective work successful?
- 9.0. How did you get to know DESMI?
  - 9.1. What were your anticipations to achieve help from DESMI?
  - 9.2. What kind of help have you as a person, or you as a collective, received from DESMI?
  - 9.3. Are you satisfied with this help? Why, why not?
- 10.0. Do you receive help from other development NGOs or governmental instances? Which?

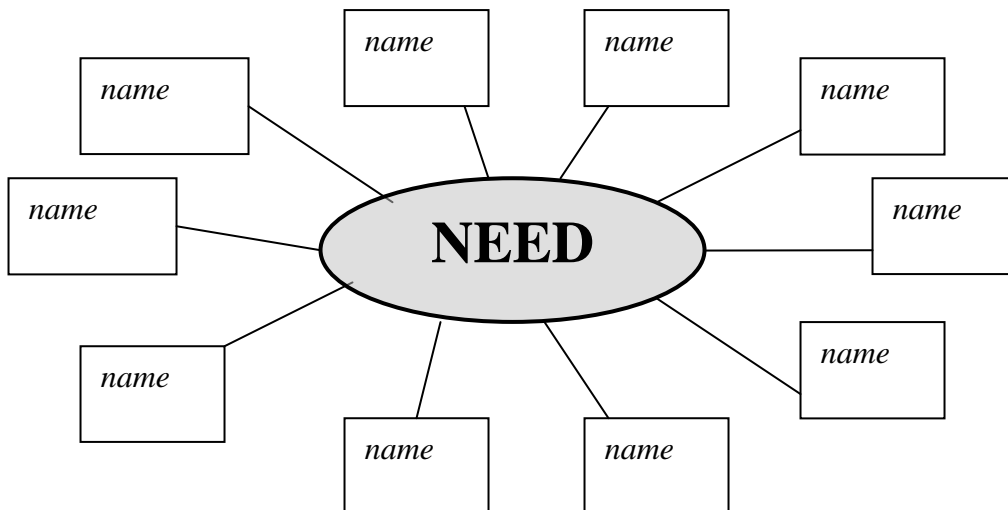
## INTERVIEW TWO

### Questions:

- 1.0. In the last six months, in what meetings, workshops, courses, social or political events have you participated in?
- 2.0. Have you organized or helped organize any of these courses/events etc.?
  - 2.1. If yes, what has your role been?
  - 2.2. Why did you choose to take on this responsibility?
- 3.0. Have you participated in any events/ courses etc. initiated by DESMI?
  - 3.1. When was this?
  - 3.2. What was your intention with participating in these events/courses etc.?
  - 3.3. Have there been any benefits with participating in these? (For you, your family etc.)
  - 3.4. If you are offered more courses, would you go? Why?
  - 3.5. What courses do you find most useful for you?

### Social network mapping

The respondent will be supplied with a large piece of paper and two different ink pens, one thick and one thin. The respondent will be asked to make a list of all his/her needs in his/her daily life during the last six months (intangible emotional needs or concrete practical tasks), and then write down the names of all the people who have helped him/her with each of these needs. The list should also include the names of other people he/she could ask to assist with each need if required (family and friends, agencies, service organizations, religious organizations/churches etc.).



The respondent should use the large paper and put his/her own name in the middle and use lines to draw the relation to the other names and institutions listed. Thin line should

be used for “thin” relationships and the “thicker” the relationship is, the thicker line will be used.

**Questions to be asked about the maps:**

- 1.0. Who are the people in this map?
  - 1.1. Where are they from?
  - 1.2. Family relations?
  - 1.3. Collective members?
- 2.0. Do you mostly get help from family and friends, or from organizations or institutions?
- 3.0. Do you feel dependent on few people for help?
  - 3.1. Why, why not?
- 4.0. Are there some people you trust to help you more than others?
  - 4.1. Why, why not?
- 5.0. Can someone you rarely utilize be asked to assist more often?
  - 5.1. Why, why not?
- 6.0. Do you feel that you are obligated to reciprocate by meeting the needs of the people of the social network you have drawn?
  - 6.1. Why?
  - 6.2. How do you do that?